DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 631 PS 017 266

AUTHOR	Dodge, Diane Trister; And Others
TITLE	The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood.
INSTITUTION	Creative Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-934362-27-0
PUB DATE	Mar 88
NOTE	384p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Teaching Strategies, P.O. Box 42243, Washington, DC 20015 ($39.95, plus $4.00 postage and handling. No charge for postage and handling on prepaid orders. Discount on orders over 20 copies).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Environment; *Creative Teaching; *Early Childhood Education; *Learning Centers (Classroom); Parent Participation; *Teacher Role; Teaching Guides; Teaching Methods; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	*Developmentally Appropriate Programs

ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide for teachers of young children provides a framework that sets forth the program's philosophy, goals, and objectives for children, as well as guidelines for teaching that address all aspects of a child's development (socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical). It attempts to offer teachers the guidance, support, and freedom to be creative and spontaneous with children. The curriculum focuses on helping the teacher provide a rich, carefully organized environment with opportunities for developmentally appropriate activities. After a general description of: (1) the philosophy and theory underlying the curriculum; (2) the goals and objectives; (3) the physical environment; (4) the teacher's role; (5) planning the daily program; and (6) the parent's role, the curriculum focuses on interest areas and describes in detail what and how children learn and the teacher's role in using each of the interest centers. These centers include blocks, house corner, table toys, art, sand and water, library corner, and outdoors. Two appendices include sample letters to parents and audiovisual resources for the curriculum. (PCB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

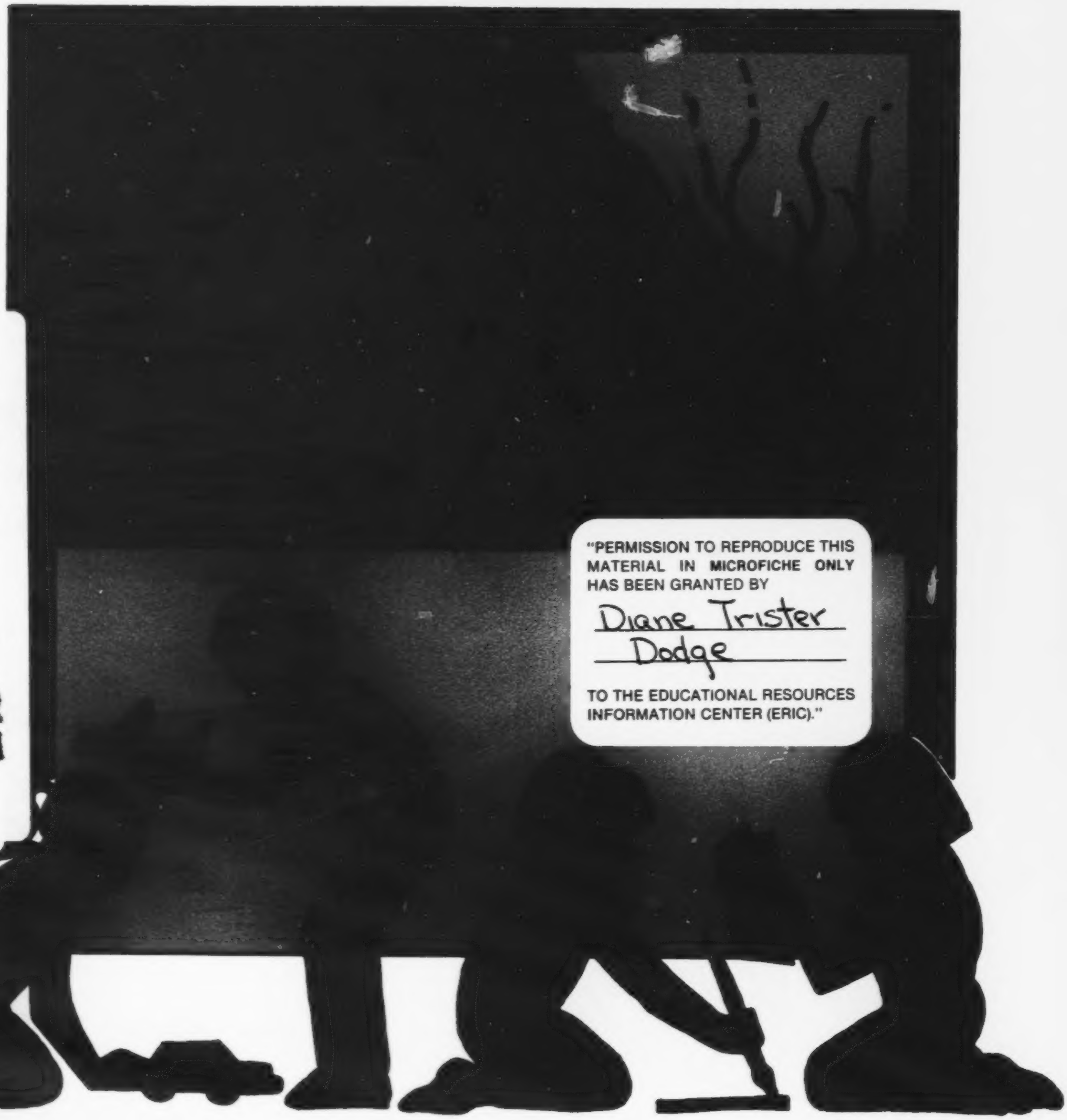
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

ED293631

PS 01[illegible]66



"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Diane Trister Dodge

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood

Diane Trister Dodge

with
Marilyn Goldhammer
Laura J. Colker

Creative Associates International, Inc.
Washington, DC

Copyright©1988 by Diane Trister Dodge
All rights reserved

Distributed by Gryphon House, Inc.
P.O. Box 275, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712

ISBN 0-934362-27-0

Library of Congress Catalogue Number: 88-70088

Preface

The *Creative Curriculum* evolved over many years of my working with teachers in a variety of early childhood settings. It did not begin as a purposeful effort to write an early childhood curriculum. Rather, in my role as an education specialist and trainer, I worked with teachers to assess what was happening in their classrooms and to enhance their teaching skills. I met with many creative and innovative teachers from whom I learned a great deal. But too often I saw tired and burned-out teachers who no longer enjoyed their work with young children.

There were many reasons for the problems I observed. In some classrooms where teachers were using a content-oriented curriculum, I noted an emphasis on teacher-directed activities. Little time was allocated for free choice and for child-initiated play. Teachers were working hard at "teaching" and focusing less on facilitating learning in children. To individualize the program, some teachers were testing children and then building their curriculum around preparing children for these tests. They were focusing on skills and deficits and failing to see the whole child. I was also distressed by the paperwork requirements many teachers were asked to meet. Elaborate lesson plans outlined everything they were going to do in a given day, leaving little room for creativity and for responding to children's immediate interests. Many of these plans were unchanged from one year to the next, whether or not they were successful. And in response to pressures from parents and public schools to "prepare preschool children for first grade," some of the teachers I worked with were using worksheets and teaching the calendar, letters, and numbers, regardless of whether the children were interested. Although aware of how difficult it was to get children to stick to a task and to listen, they persevered even when faced with inattentive children. Many of these teachers were not enjoying their work; their own innate creativity was stifled. As a result, they were failing to inspire self-esteem, learning, and creativity in children.

My first strategy was to help teachers look at the classroom environment and how it was failing to support them. The way teachers had organized their classrooms was usually working against their goals for children. The dramatic changes in children's behavior each time we rearranged a classroom convinced many of the teachers I dealt with that room arrangement was a powerful teaching tool--one that could support them and free them to engage in more positive interactions with children. Once the environment was organized and arranged to support free choice and active learning, we began to focus on the learning potential in each area of the room and outdoors. By stressing interest areas instead of content or skills, we kept the focus on the environment where learning takes place. Workshops I developed during this time stressed how to set up interest areas, how children can learn in each area, and the teacher's role in promoting learning and growth. Documenting the workshops led to the idea of developing a set of curriculum modules, each focusing on a distinct area of the preschool classroom.

From this focus on the environment, the *Creative Curriculum* emerged as a set of modules and trainers' guides. Originally published in 1979, it addressed four areas of the classroom: Blocks, Table Toys, Art, and the House Corner. In 1986 and 1987, Head Start teachers at the Franklin-Vance-Warren program in Henderson, North Carolina, Operation Breakthrough in Durham, North Carolina, and Fauquier County Community Action Program in Warrenton, Virginia, received training on the curriculum and field-tested it in their classrooms. They provided us with suggestions for enhancing and expanding the content. In 1987, the *Creative Curriculum* was revised and expanded to include Setting the Stage and three additional modules: Sand and Water, Library Corner, and Outdoors.

The curriculum provides a basic structure for a developmentally appropriate program. No matter what other curriculum models teachers may use, the *Creative Curriculum* can serve as the foundation for any program based on child development theory. Because we know that young children learn best through active interactions with the physical and social environment, the curriculum keeps the focus on the environment. By continually changing and enriching the environment, teachers can support learning and creativity in children. By freeing teachers to respond to children's interests and explorations, the curriculum supports the teacher's creativity.

The *Creative Curriculum* addresses the roles that both teachers and parents play in enhancing the development of preschool children from three to five years of age. As used here, the word "teacher" refers to any adult working with young children in a classroom setting, including head teachers, teacher aides, teacher assistants, caregivers, and volunteers.

It is my hope that this curriculum will help all adults who work with young children rediscover their own creativity and joy in teaching.

Diane Trister Dodge
January 1988

Acknowledgments

Many excellent trainers and educators have contributed to the development of the *Creative Curriculum*. Peter Pizzolongo and Ruth Uhlmann provided training and support to the Head Start programs that validated the curriculum. They each contributed to the revised curriculum. Kris Hansen drafted the Outdoors module, an important addition to the curriculum. Letters to parents were written by Dr. Mary Lewis.

The expert guidance we received from Dr. Jenni Klein and Judith Rothchild-Stolberg kept us on track and further validated the content. Graphic design and layout were undertaken by Beth Glover Hudgins; illustrations from the original curriculum were prepared by Brian Jones and Kathy Niebo. And steadfast support was provided by Debra Foulks as production coordinator.

I particularly wish to acknowledge Dr. Pamela Coughlin, Clennie Murphy, and E. Dollie Wolverton of the National Head Start Bureau, who believed strongly that Head Start programs should be offered a choice in selecting a developmentally appropriate curriculum. They made it possible for us to validate the curriculum in Head Start classrooms.

To all these people and to the many others who helped make the *Creative Curriculum* a reality, my deepest thanks.

Introduction

What is an early childhood curriculum? Ask this question and you will hear many different answers. Some people will refer to a book of activities that precisely outlines what, when, and how children should be taught. Others will say more broadly that "curriculum is everything"; an early childhood teacher simply needs to follow children's interests and build on what happens each day.

Teaching young children *is* a creative process, one that lies somewhere between these two extremes. Early childhood teachers do not need to follow a prescribed course of study as might someone teaching a class in biology or history. Nor can they rely on simply reacting to what happens each day, without any goals or plans in mind. Rather, early childhood teachers depend on a curriculum framework that sets forth the program's philosophy, goals, and objectives for children, as well as guidelines for teaching that address all aspects of a child's development: socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical. An early childhood curriculum provides the framework for what actually happens in a planned environment where children interact with materials, their peers, and adults. The primary teaching goal is to help young children use the environment productively and see themselves as capable learners--as individuals who are developing the skills and understandings that will enable them to make sense of the world and to succeed in it.

Teaching young children in the context just described requires spontaneity--the ability to see and use everyday opportunities to help children solve problems, explore new materials, and find answers to questions. It also requires constant thinking and decision making on the part of the teacher:

- Should I intervene or should I step back and let the child try to resolve a problem?
- What questions can I ask to help the child think through a solution?
- Is the child ready for these materials, or will they prove frustrating?
- Is the room arrangement working, or do I need to modify it?

There is general agreement among experts that a good curriculum for young children must be developmentally appropriate.* This means that the quality of the program will be defined, in large measure, by the extent to which the environment, activities, and interactions are rooted in the teachers' understanding of developmental stages and knowledge of each child. The decisions teachers make in planning the curriculum and in spontaneously reacting to what happens each day are therefore based on a knowledge of normal child development and what is known about each child's interests, abilities, needs, and background.

---

* See Sue Bredekamp (ed.), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Washington, DC: NAECY, 1986).

To plan appropriately, teachers must find answers to questions such as these:

- What can I expect of a child at each stage of development?
- How does a child learn at each stage of development?
- What do I know about each child that will help me individualize the program?
- What activities are appropriate for each child?
- What learning materials are appropriate for each child?
- How can I adapt the environment and materials in order to include children with disabilities?
- What teaching strategies are most effective for use with each child?
- What role will each child's parents play in the program?

An effective early childhood curriculum offers teachers answers to these questions. It serves as the basic framework that enables teachers to make appropriate decisions. Inherent in this framework are:

- **A statement of philosophy**--the beliefs and theories that guide curriculum development and implementation, including an understanding of how children develop physically, socio-emotionally, and intellectually.
- **Goals and objectives**--the skills, attitudes, and understandings targeted for mastery.
- **The physical environment**--specific guidance on the importance of room arrangement and how to select and display materials to support the development of trust, independence, and initiative.
- **The teacher's role**--a clear definition of teaching strategies that promote learning and growth.
- **The parent's role**--a commitment to the joint partnership of parents and teachers in promoting each child's growth and development.

The *Creative Curriculum* offers teachers the guidance, support, and freedom to be creative and spontaneous with children. Because children learn from their daily interactions with the environment, a carefully organized and rich environment is the foundation for the *Creative Curriculum*. Central to the use of the environment is an understanding of the potential of various materials to enhance learning and teaching, and a knowledge of how these materials meet the developmental needs of young children. Because the *Creative Cur-*

riculum focuses on the developmental progress of each child, it offers an ideal setting for children of all abilities, including those who are disabled.

The *Creative Curriculum* provides guidance to teachers by focusing on interest areas. It describes in detail what and how children learn and the teacher's role in using each of the following interest areas to support children's development:

- Blocks
- House Corner
- Table Toys
- Art
- Sand and Water
- Library Corner
- Outdoors.

The *Creative Curriculum* fosters creativity in both children and teachers. In the context of the *Creative Curriculum*, being creative means thinking of new ideas, obtaining information by asking questions, learning through trial and error, and benefitting from mistakes. Children's creativity is supported through an environment that encourages them to try out ideas and to risk making mistakes. Teachers' creativity is supported by a curriculum framework that encourages teachers to be innovative and responsive to children. By focusing on both teacher and child, the *Creative Curriculum* provides a blueprint for developing an educational setting in which young children can thrive.

Contents

Setting the Stage 1
Blocks 61
House Corner 117
Table Toys 151
Art 189
Sand and Water 251
Library 281
Outdoors 327
Appendices 367

Setting the Stage

I. Philosophy and Theory of the *Creative Curriculum* 1

- How Children Learn to Think 1
- How Children Develop Socio-Emotionally 4
- How Children Develop Physically 6

II. Goals and Objectives 9

- Cognitive Growth 9
- Socio-Emotional Growth 12
- Physical Growth 13

III. The Physical Environment 15

- How the Physical Environment Affects People 15
- Organizing Indoor Space 15
- Making Interest Areas Work 17
- Messages in the Environment 18
- Identifying Problems Possibly Caused by Room Arrangement 21
- Organizing Outdoor Space 22

IV. The Teacher's Role in Implementing the *Creative Curriculum* 25

- Observing Children 25
- Reinforcing Children's Play 28
- Extending and Enriching Children's Play 29
- Individualizing the Curriculum 31
- Helping Children Learn Social Skills 33

V. Planning the Daily Program 36

- The Daily Schedule 36
- Weekly and Long-Term Planning 40
- Units and Themes in the *Creative Curriculum* 42
- The Role of Free Play in the *Creative Curriculum* 43
- Circle Time 44
- Transition Times 45
- Making Mealtimes Enjoyable for Young Children 46
- Naptime 47

VI. The Parent's Role in the *Creative Curriculum* 49

Setting the Stage for a Partnership 49
Ongoing Communication with Parents 50
Involving Parents in the Daily Program 52
Parent Conferences as a Way to Individualize the Program 53
Sharing the Creative Curriculum with Parents 55

VII. For Further Reading 57

I. Philosophy and Theory of the Creative Curriculum

The *Creative Curriculum* is rooted in accepted educational philosophy and theory as well as practice. It relies heavily on Jean Piaget's theories of how children learn to think, on Erik Erikson's stages of socio-emotional development, and on accepted principles of physical development.

How Children Learn to Think

From documented educational research, we know that children learn by doing. It is through active involvement with their environment that they make sense of the world around them. They learn by observing what happens when they interact with materials and other people. They spontaneously involve themselves in activities such as block building, painting, or dramatic play, adding pieces of information to what they already know and generating new information. Children learn simple concepts and then use these concepts to understand more complex ideas. Piaget terms this process one of assimilation and accommodation.

Young children view the world concretely, yet their view changes as they mature. What they know at any given point will depend on what firsthand experiences they have had. By interacting with their physical environment (indoor and outdoor) and their social environment (other children and adults), they continually broaden their frame of reference.

For the young child just beginning the learning process, everything is concrete, all is literal:

- Three-year-old child to parent: "We went on a walk at school today. We were looking for signs of winter, but I only saw one STOP sign."
- Parent reading to a four-year-old: "...and then he bawled him out." Child, incredulously: "You mean he took away all his hair?"

Cause and effect likewise have concrete origins for the young child:

- A three-year-old observes: "Today we are having fish because the teacher is late. Whenever the teacher is late, we have fish."
- A four-year-old noticed that a friend didn't want ice cream one night. Later that night, the friend became sick. The next day, when offered ice cream, the child said, "Yes, I want some, because if I don't have ice cream, I'll get sick like Laurie did."

In each case the child has noted certain events and has tried to interpret them so as to make sense of the world. As the child expands this learning process, the environment plays a critical role. The richer the environment, the more opportunities for children to learn by doing--to learn by interacting with materials and people, and to act upon the environment in a concrete, firsthand manner. Thus, the accepted role of the teacher is to create an environment that invites children to observe, to be active, to make choices, and to experiment.

As mentioned, the *Creative Curriculum* builds on Piaget's theories of development in young children. Piaget believed that children learn through active exploration of their environment. During the preschool years they add to what they have learned about the world during their infant and toddler explorations. During those early explorations, when all was new, they discovered that objects have weight, volume, and color, and that all objects take up space. They made these discoveries by grasping, rolling, pounding, smelling, sucking, and crawling around and over everything they came in contact with. During their first three years of life they also begin to learn about symbolism--something they later need when they discover reading and writing. For infants and toddlers, symbolism is the art of imitation. They use their bodies and their fingers, feet, hands, and eyes to imitate actions they see others performing. The exploration of the first few years also introduces children to the concepts of causality and time. Infants and toddlers become aware of events that lead to other events (e.g., if the carriage moves, then something is pushing it).

In a rich preschool environment, young children can supplement what they have learned through these early experiences. The symbolic imitation of infants and toddlers leads to the development of language. Preschoolers begin to use the spoken word as a symbol for representing people, things, movements, feelings, and ideas. As children explore their world, they talk about their observations and experiences. They also hear about the world and begin to understand the symbolization (language) of others. Their environment becomes larger and richer as they learn to make use of the language they hear as well as their own. However, the world they learn about through language makes sense only if the words are tied to play with real objects. Young children must have firsthand contact with the world they hear about if they are to truly understand what is being said.

During the preschool years, children also begin to think in terms of classes, numbers, and relationships. They group things on the basis of one or more classifying schemes:

- descriptive classifications (size, color, shape, or other attributes);
- generic classifications (general categories, such as animals, transportation vehicles, shells, or plants); and
- relational classifications (function or association, such as cup and saucer or firefighter and firetruck).

These groupings are made as children physically manipulate real objects and discuss their actions.

Through the development of language and the ability to think in terms of classes, numbers, and relationships, children acquire the foundation for the logic involved in such abstract skills as reading, writing, and computing. Preschool children need many opportunities to play with real objects as they use language, symbolize, and classify. The *Creative Curriculum* emphasizes children's direct manipulation of materials so they can build on their repertoires of experience. The *Creative Curriculum* also provides teachers with an approach to promoting the child's interactions with the classroom environment by providing the child with information-gathering and questioning strategies. The object of these strategies is to help children learn to solve problems. Children who are good problem solvers are better prepared for our increasingly complex world. They are more flexible in their thinking than children who do not know how to apply knowledge to new situations. They can use a variety of problem-solving techniques. They can think in terms of probabilities. They can distinguish between types of problems and their possible solutions.

In the *Creative Curriculum* environment, teachers make statements and ask questions that encourage children to think. The focus is on helping children label and organize their world. For example, teachers make statements and ask children to describe what they are doing and what they remember about activities:

- "You're using the spatula to flip the hamburgers. You really have to flip fast, don't you?"
- "Tell me about your drawing."
- "Tell me all you know about these blocks."
- "What did you see on the neighborhood walk this morning?"
- "Tell me all you remember about *Blueberries for Sal*."

These descriptive statements and requests for information allow children to acquire and use language for labeling and organizing without fear of making mistakes. There are many right answers, so all can succeed at this task.

Teachers help children use what they know to discover new information. For example, teachers set up cause-and-effect experiences:

- "You added white paint to the red paint and got a lighter color. What do you think will happen if we added white to the blue paint? Or red to the yellow?"
- "This cup is floating in the water. What would happen if we filled up the cup with pebbles?"

In the *Creative Curriculum* environment, teachers help children make comparisons and classify:

- "How are these buttons the same? How are they different from each other?"
- "Put the keys that are the same in this box. How are these keys alike?"

Teachers also help children look for many possible ideas and solutions to problems:

- "What are some ways we can use this collection of bottle caps?"

- "What do you think would happen if the clock on the wall stopped running, and no other clocks worked either?"

Teachers help encourage children to value their own thoughts and feelings about the world:

- "What do you think about your play dough sculpture?"
- "How would you feel if you had to move to another town?"

And teachers help children use language in a nurturing, nonthreatening way. Children are not constantly "tested" by such questions as:

- "What color is this?"
- "What shape is this?"
- "How many blocks did you use?"

These questions have only one correct answer. They are questions designed to test children, not to help them learn to think and solve problems. In the *Creative Curriculum* environment, children learn to use shape, color, and number as they play with real objects; classify, sort, or put items in a sequence; and talk about their actions. In an environment where adults ask questions that lead to discoveries, children learn the importance of questioning, experimenting, and exploring. These activities in turn help children learn to think, solve problems, and develop the logical skills they will need to succeed in an ever-changing world.

How Children Develop Socio-Emotionally

At the same time that children are interacting with the environment in ways that promote their cognitive development, they are also developing socially and emotionally. They begin to detach themselves from the adults in the classroom and to work independently. As they attempt to play with other children, they learn about sharing and cooperation. They are distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. They are learning to deal with frustration and to take pride in what they are doing. They develop socio-emotional competence as well as intellectual competence. Socio-emotional development thus goes hand in hand with cognitive development.

Much of what we know about children's socio-emotional development during the preschool years is based on the work of Erik Erikson in the 1950s. Erikson set forth a framework of stages of socio-emotional development through which all people pass. These stages are sequential: early stages lead to future stages. Once passed through, the early stages are never entirely forgotten.

Erikson maintains that there are eight stages of socio-emotional growth from infancy to old age. At each stage, people confront particular socio-emotional circumstances that must be dealt with. How these situations are handled determines how a person's character and personality develop. To illustrate, according to Erikson, at the first stage of development children learn to either trust or mistrust their environment. Infants who are consistently cared for learn that their environment can be trusted. They come to know that they will be fed when they are hungry, changed when they are soiled, and comforted when they are upset. They learn, too, that when parents go away, they will return. This sense of trust gives children the security to venture out on their own. Independence is an outgrowth of trust.

During the preschool years, children deal with two specific stages of socio-emotional growth:

- learning to be independent and in control of oneself; and
- learning to take initiative and assert oneself in socially acceptable ways.

The *Creative Curriculum* shows teachers how to foster positive responses to these two stages. In the type of environment outlined in the *Creative Curriculum*, children develop a sense of trust and begin to feel "connected." Belonging and acceptance are encouraged. Children are made to feel safe and encouraged to explore not only materials but also their relationships with peers and adults. They feel important and valued when others listen to them, seek out their ideas, and allow them to express themselves. This type of environment encourages both autonomy and self-control. Children learn to handle their feelings in acceptable, socially appropriate ways. They learn to make age-appropriate decisions and experience a sense of control over their lives. They also come to see that what they say and do affects other people.

Competence and initiative are similarly encouraged by this type of environment. By setting clear, age-appropriate expectations for behavior and by letting children know what is expected of them, teachers can engender success and minimize frustration. Children's concerns about doing things "right" diminish because they are encouraged to learn from their mistakes, to explore, and to take risks.

Specifically, through the *Creative Curriculum*, children's socio-emotional development is enhanced in the following ways:

- Children develop a sense of trust when teachers

  follow a consistent schedule;

  carry through on announced plans and/or promises;

  make contact with each child during the day; and

  make positive comments about children's play activities.

- Children develop a sense of competence when teachers

  reinforce their play activities by letting them know that their actions are valued;

  give them developmentally appropriate materials to play with;

provide them with materials that build on their strengths;

praise their efforts;

help channel their frustrations; and

encourage them to see tasks through to completion.

- Children develop a sense of initiative when teachers

  provide them with ample opportunities for creative expression;

  allow them to freely explore the environment;

  permit children to get messy during sand, water, or art activities;

  provide dramatic play and storytelling opportunities for children to work through problems; and

  encourage children to work independently, to take risks, to problem solve, and to apply learned knowledge to fresh situations.

In sum, in the *Creative Curriculum* teachers encourage children to develop fully. Recognizing the interplay between cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth, teachers promote development of the whole child. They know that children who are socio-emotionally competent will get the most from the preschool program--and from life itself.

How Children Develop Physically

Physical development is sometimes taken for granted in preschool education. We assume children will progress through a predictable sequence and acquire predictable skills. To a certain extent this is true; however, a number of factors can promote or slow down physical development.

Normal physical development relies on good health, proper nutrition, and a safe environment. Proper nutrition, beginning during the prenatal months, is critical to both mental and physical development. During these years, children need well-balanced meals and snacks that are high in nutrients and low in fats, salt, and sugar. Many health problems can be identified through screening during the preschool years. Developmental lags can often be treated early to ensure optimal growth. Chronic conditions such as allergies, poor posture, or abnormal fatigue should also be diagnosed and treated, or they will affect development. Finally, a safe environment is a prerequisite for promoting physical development. Children need an indoor and outdoor space where they can try out all their newly acquired skills without danger of injury.

As young children grow physically, their muscles develop and mature. Children are able to perform more complex and refined actions. Both gross and fine motor development are critical, although gross motor development usually comes before fine motor development. Gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the body. Most young children enjoy activities such as running, skipping, throwing, catching, jumping, climbing, pulling, carrying and balancing. These activities allow children to use and refine their gross motor skills in a natural way. Children must be physically ready to develop each new skill and should be given opportunities to try these new skills over and over again.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, teachers enhance gross motor skill development by providing both a safe space and equipment and materials for children to practice skills. By offering encouragement, guidance, and reinforcement for efforts and accomplishments, teachers establish an environment in which children want to perform activities requiring physical skills.

Fine motor activities involve the use of small muscles such as those in the wrist and hand. Refinement and coordination of these muscles are critical for writing. Appropriate activities for developing fine motor skills include building block towers, molding clay or play dough, using scissors or tongs, stringing beads, placing pegs in holes, drawing with crayons or markers, and painting. As children gain control over their small muscles and learn to coordinate movements, their drawings reflect their increasing skills. From making scribbles and marks on a page, they start to draw circles, curves, and lines and then begin to combine these shapes. Gradually, these shapes remind them of something, and they will name what they draw. Their drawings begin to look more and more like real objects and people, and they experiment with letters. By the time they are five, most children can write their names.

As with the development of gross motor skills, the *Creative Curriculum* demonstrates how teachers can set up an environment and plan activities that allow children to develop and practice their fine motor skills as they become developmentally ready and interested.

The *Creative Curriculum* also provides teachers with guidance on how to develop other physical skills that are basic to children's overall development. For example, eye-hand coordination and directionality are physical skills for reading, writing, and math readiness. By providing teachers with strategies for improving children's physical skills, the *Creative Curriculum* supports development in all areas. To illustrate, teachers can encourage children to string beads, to line up shells in a sandbox, or to use the zipper of a self-help frame. These activities give children the developmental practice they need to refine their powers of eye-hand coordination and directionality. However, at the same time that they are developing these physical skills, they are acquiring skills that will improve their cognitive abilities in reading, writing, and math.

Physical development also affects children's socio-emotional development. As children learn what their bodies can and can't do, they gain self-confidence. If they perceive themselves as capable of large and small muscle movement, they can practice gross and fine motor skills with success. This attitude of success allows them to expand on all their physical skills without fear of failure. It also gives them a positive attitude toward growing and learning in other areas of development.

The theories that underlie an appreciation of how children learn and develop cognitively, socio-emotionally, and physically are an important factor in designing and implementing a curriculum. Teachers who understand developmental theory are equipped to make appropriate decisions as they plan for young children. The educational theories and practices described in this section provide the foundation for defining the goals and objectives of the *Creative Curriculum*, which are discussed in the next section.

II. Goals and Objectives

In an early childhood curriculum, goals and objectives are specified in all areas of development: cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical. Clear goals and objectives are important planning tools for teachers in defining and implementing the curriculum. They state what children can be expected to achieve and provide a way of assessing each child's growth during the year. Goals and objectives are also instrumental in assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum itself.

To be effective, goals and objectives need to reflect the philosophy underlying the curriculum. Clear goals and objectives that grow out of a comprehensive philosophy and theory help teachers know where they are heading with each activity and how they should plan to carry out each one. For example, one goal of socio-emotional development is to demonstrate cooperative, pro-social behaviors. With this goal in mind, teachers might develop strategies such as the following:

- setting up the physical environment so children can work successfully in small groups;
- helping children learn to share and take turns by giving them specific ways to know when they will have a turn with materials;
- posting a job chart so each child has responsibilities for maintaining the room; and
- helping children work through disputes so they learn skills in negotiating and problem solving.

Listed below are specific goals and objectives for children who participate in a program using the *Creative Curriculum*. They represent the knowledge and skills most children acquire between three and five years of age. However, all children should not be expected to acquire, during their preschool years, every objective listed. Learning is a process; each child grows at his or her own pace. Children with disabilities may progress through some of the developmental stages at a slower pace than their peers. Teachers should be aware of the effects of each child's specific condition in order to select appropriate goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are offered as guideposts for teachers who implement the *Creative Curriculum*. They can be modified or others may be added as appropriate.

Cognitive Growth

As based on the Piagetian framework described in Section I, a major goal of the *Creative Curriculum* is to help children develop a positive attitude toward learning. Children are encouraged to ask questions and explore. This in turn enhances their ability to solve problems, recognize cause-and-effect relationships, and plan. Children are encouraged to try out their ideas, experiment, and use materials creatively. Specific goals and objectives for cognitive development are outlined below.

- To develop a positive attitude toward learning:
    - to be successful in learning activities
    - to make discoveries
    - to take risks
    - to continue with a task after making a mistake.
- To enhance learning skills:
    - to ask questions
    - to use perceptual/motor skills, such as figure/ground discrimination, part/whole discrimination, and configuration
    - to explore and investigate something new in the environment
    - to recall experiences.
- To expand logical thinking skills:
    - to identify similarities and differences among objects (e.g., shapes, colors, sizes, textures)
    - to sort objects according to common characteristics (e.g., things that look alike, things that belong together)
    - to identify common characteristics of objects and events
    - to arrange events in a sequence (e.g., what happened first, second, and last)
    - to arrange objects in a series (e.g., smallest to largest)
    - to recognize patterns and be able to repeat them
    - to explain simple cause-and-effect relationships on the basis of concrete experiences
    - to identify solutions to problems.
- To acquire concepts and information leading to a better understanding of the immediate world:
    - to demonstrate an understanding of time concepts (sequence of the day's activities; yesterday, today, and tomorrow)

to use concepts of quantity, volume, and mass to solve problems

to identify and use the names of objects and things in the environment (e.g., plants, animals, people)

to make comparisons (e.g., more/less, larger/smaller, taller/shorter)

to identify and use words to describe the characteristics of objects (e.g., colors, sizes, shapes)

to identify the roles people play in society (e.g., family members, doctors, construction workers, grocery clerks)

to identify where objects exist in space (below, inside, under)

to use numbers in correct sequence

to match one-to-one when counting.

- To expand verbal communication skills:

  to listen to a story and explain what happened

  to recall words in a song or finger play

  to identify word order and sentence patterns

  to follow simple directions

  to use words to explain ideas and feelings

  to talk with other children during daily activities

  to use correct grammar

  to participate in group discussions.

- To acquire beginning written communication skills:

  to make increasingly representational drawings

  to move from scribbling to using some letters and numbers

  to recognize written names

  to print one's name

to demonstrate an interest in using writing tools for a purpose (e.g., making signs, sending letters).

Socio-Emotional Growth

The *Creative Curriculum*, consistent with the teachings of Erikson, focuses on establishing a supportive emotional climate in which learning can occur. Children are encouraged to develop a sense of trust and security that promotes self-esteem. Children learn to appreciate the viewpoints of others and to value their own opinions. As children begin to operate as members of a group, they learn to express their feelings, opinions, and attitudes. The confidence they gain through these experiences encourages them to be more curious, more active, and more creative learners. Specific goals and objectives for socio-emotional development are outlined below.

- To experience a sense of self-esteem:

    to identify oneself as a member of a specific family and cultural group

    to demonstrate confidence in growing abilities

    to demonstrate increasing independence

    to stand up for one's rights.

- To exhibit a positive attitude toward life:

    to demonstrate interest and enthusiasm in classroom activities

    to try new activities

    to demonstrate trust in adults

    to be able to separate from parents

    to participate in routine activities easily.

- To demonstrate cooperative, pro-social behavior:

    to seek out adults and children

    to identify and appreciate differences

    to accept some responsibility for maintaining the classroom environment

    to help others in need

    to respect the rights of others

to share with others and be able to take turns

to interact positively with others

to work cooperatively with others on completing a task.

Physical Growth

In addition to the cognitive and socio-emotional goals already highlighted, the *Creative Curriculum* promotes children's physical development, including that of large and small muscle skills. From child development research, we know that children need to feel comfortable with their bodies and with what they are physically able to do if they are to succeed fully. Specific goals and objectives for physical development are outlined below.

- To enhance large muscle skills:

  to use large muscle skills with confidence

  to walk up and down steps

  to run with increasing control over direction and speed

  to jump over objects or from objects without falling

  to use large muscles for balance (e.g., walk on tiptoe, balance on one foot)

  to catch a ball or bean bag

  to throw an object in the intended direction

  to ride and steer a tricycle

  to climb up or down equipment without falling.

- To enhance and refine small muscle skills:

  to use small muscle skills with confidence

  to coordinate eye and hand movements (e.g., assemble puzzle pieces of increasing difficulty, string beads, use scissors)

  to use small muscles to complete tasks (e.g., build with blocks, stack graduated cylinders, place pegs in pegboards)

  to use small muscles for self-help skills (e.g., pour without spilling, use eating utensils, zip and button)

  to manipulate objects with increasing control to use writing and drawing tools with increasing control and intention.

- To use all senses to increase physical capabilities:

  to identify similarities and differences in sounds

  to identify how things are visually alike and different

  to identify foods by taste

  to identify how things smell

  to balance with increasing skill

  to respond to rhythm

  to use directionality

  to refine eye-hand coordination.

Taken together, the goals and objectives within these three areas of development form the foundation for the *Creative Curriculum*. By focusing on children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth, the *Creative Curriculum* promotes an integrated and effective developmental approach to learning. The next section explains how the physical environment can support the attainment of these goals and objectives.

III. The Physical Environment

Young children learn by actively exploring and interacting with their physical environment. A well-organized and rich environment enhances learning and growth. The *Creative Curriculum* helps define such an environment.

How the Physical Environment Affects People

We are all affected by our environment. Our physical surroundings affect how we feel, how comfortable we are, how we relate to others, and how successfully we accomplish our goals.

For the young child, the environment is particularly important. For example, the size of the classroom and outdoor play areas, the colors of the walls, the type of furniture and flooring, the amount of light, and the number of windows all influence how children learn. While these are factors teachers have limited control over, there are many things teachers can do to create a supportive and interesting environment for young children. Thoughtful arrangement of the indoor and outdoor environments can support teachers' goals for children.

Organizing Indoor Space

A preschool classroom should have clearly defined and well-equipped interest areas that are arranged to promote independence, foster decision making, and encourage involvement. When the room is divided into interest areas, children are offered clear choices. Sometimes children want to work alone quietly or to be with one or two other children. An area set aside for books, art, or table toys provides opportunities for quiet play. At other times children prefer more active play. Areas set aside for dramatic play, block building, woodworking, or large muscle experiences give children options for active play.

Interest areas should be arranged so as to:

- separate noisy areas from quiet ones;
- clearly define each area using shelves, tables, or tape;
- display materials at a height accessible to children;
- separate children's materials from teachers' supplies;
- help children see what choices are available and how materials are to be used;
- logically place interest areas near needed resources (e.g., art area near water);
- allow teachers to see all the areas without obstruction; and

- incorporate a traffic pattern that keeps children from constantly interrupting each other.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the environment includes the following interest areas:

- Blocks
- House Corner
- Table Toys
- Art
- Sand and Water
- Library Corner
- Outdoors.

Based on the foregoing criteria for arrangement of interest areas, the following floor plan illustrates what a *Creative Curriculum* classroom might look like.

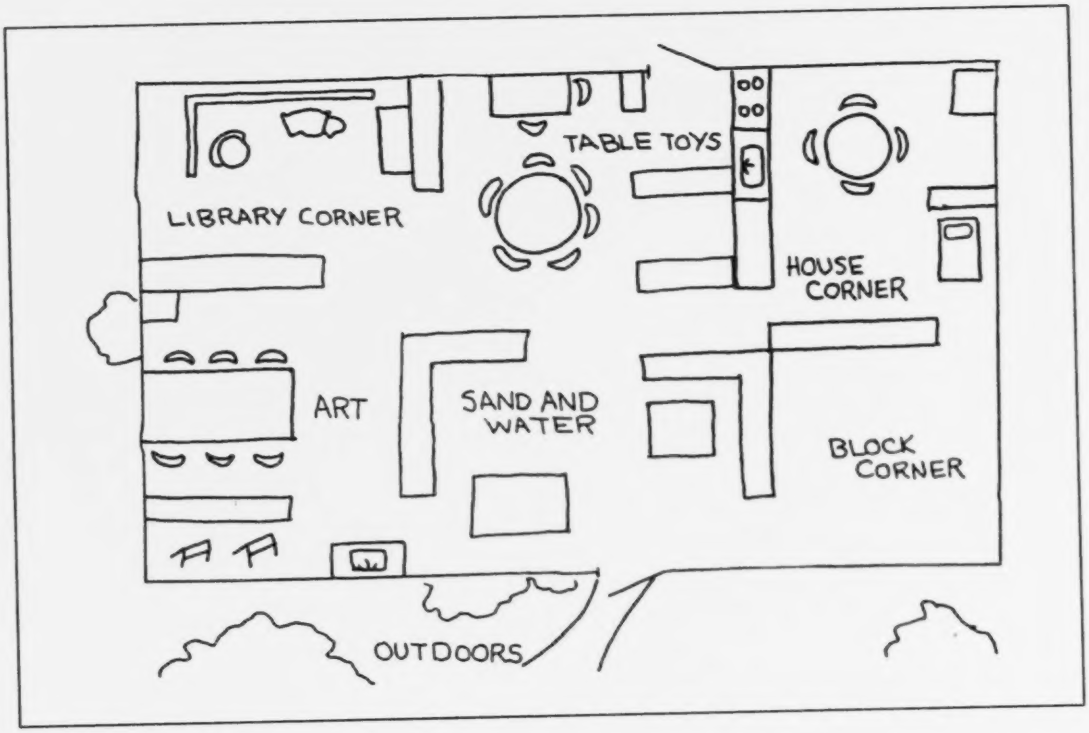


TABLE TOYS
LIBRARY CORNER
HOUSE CORNER
ART
SAND AND WATER
BLOCK CORNER
OUTDOORS

This plan reveals that an appropriately arranged environment has these characteristics:

- Each interest area is clearly defined.
- The block corner is enclosed by walls and shelves to protect the builders.
- The house corner is in a separate area located near the block corner.
- The art shelf is accessible to a table, and the easels are out of the line of traffic.
- The table toy area and library corner--both quiet interest areas--are located next to each other.
- The distinct boundaries and lack of open areas discourage children from running in the room.

Making Interest Areas Work

Defining interest areas is the first step in creating an effective learning environment. The next step is ensuring that the areas work as intended. Observing children's behavior as they use these areas is the best way to determine if the areas are working effectively. Teachers know that the environment is working if children are able to:

- make choices and select activities on their own;
- use materials appropriately and creatively once they enter an area;
- stick with an activity and stay involved for a designated period of time;
- experience success when they play in an interest area; and
- help care for materials.

Interest areas work as intended when (1) the materials selected are appropriate, and (2) the display and care of these materials is well-organized. A rich environment does not require an abundance of purchased materials. On the contrary, many materials can be collected and brought in from home, such as dress-up clothes and props for the house corner, plastic bottles and measuring cups for the water table, bottle caps to sort and match, and natural materials for a collection table. In addition, many excellent classroom materials and games can be made by teachers and/or parents.

In selecting materials, teachers should consider these questions:

- **Will the materials interest children?** Daily observations help teachers decide which types of materials are of interest to a particular group of children.

- **Do the children have the skills to handle the materials?** Do the materials vary in the level of complexity so that children functioning at different developmental stages can play together and feel successful? For example, is there a 10-piece puzzle for a child with a high skill level and a large 2-piece puzzle for a child who has a physical disability?

- **Will the materials challenge children to think and explore?** For example, a balance scale set out on a table with boxes of things to weigh and compare can readily engage children's interest and encourage them to experiment.

- **Do the materials reflect the children's diverse cultural backgrounds?** For example, pictures in children's books, wooden figures for the block area, and dolls in the house corner should be representative of the ethnic mix of children in the classroom.

- **Do the materials help achieve specified curriculum goals?** For example, will they promote creativity? Thinking skills? Language development? Small and large muscle control?

Interest areas also work effectively if the materials are well-organized and inviting to children.

- All materials should be in good condition, with no broken parts or missing pieces.

- Materials should be clean and free of splinters or jagged edges.

- Toys with small parts or pieces should be stored in containers, boxes, or dish pans.

- All materials should have specified storage areas. Picture labels taped to shelves, for instance, can help children find and return the materials they use.

- Materials typically used together should be grouped together.

Messages in the Environment

The types of materials in a classroom and the way in which they are organized convey important messages to children. When the room is attractive, cheerful, orderly, and filled with interesting objects, the message is: "This is a comfortable place where you can explore, feel safe, and learn." When children see cubbies with their pictures or names on them, their art displayed on the wall at their eye level, and places for their personal belongings, the message is: "You belong here. This is your space, too."

Teachers who are aware of the power of the environment are able to arrange indoor and outdoor spaces to convey the messages they want children to receive. Examples of specific messages and how the environment can convey them are given below.

This Is a Cheerful and Happy Place

- Neutral colors (gray, off-white, beige) are used on the walls and bright colors are used selectively to highlight interest areas or mark storage areas on shelves.
- Furniture is clean and well-maintained.
- Wall decorations include children's art displayed attractively at the children's eye level and with large spaces of blank wall so that children are not overwhelmed.
- Decorations such as plants, fabric-covered pillows, and colorful tablecloths are used in the classroom.

You Belong Here

- There is a cubby or place where each child can keep personal things and with each child's name and/or picture inside.
- Furniture is child-sized.
- Pictures on the wall, in books, and in learning materials show people of ethnic backgrounds similar to the children in the class.
- Each child's artwork is displayed and protected.
- Materials, equipment, and furniture are adapted so children with disabilities can be involved in all areas of the classroom.

This Is a Place You Can Trust

- A well-defined schedule is provided so children learn the order of events that occur each day.
- Shelves are neat and uncluttered so children can see what materials and toys are available.
- Pictures illustrate the schedule so children can "read" it.
- Furniture and materials are arranged consistently and labeled so children know where to find the things they need.

- Consistency is provided in routines such as eating, napping, and toileting.

You Can Do Many Things on Your Own and Be Independent

- Materials are stored on low shelves, encouraging children to select and use materials on their own.
- Materials are logically organized (drawing paper near the markers and crayons, pegs near the pegboards) and located in areas where they are to be used (table toys on a shelf near low tables, blocks and props in the block corner).
- Shelves are labeled with pictures that show children where toys and materials belong.
- An illustrated job chart shows what each child's responsibilities are.
- Open spaces outdoors encourage children to run.

You Can Get Away and Be by Yourself When You Need To

- Small, quiet areas of the room accommodate one or two children.
- There is a large pillow or stuffed chair in a quiet corner of the classroom.
- There are headphones for a phonograph or tape recorder for individual listening.

This Is a Safe Place to Explore and Try Out Your Ideas

- There are protected and defined quiet areas for small group activities (e.g., a table with three to four chairs enclosed by low shelves containing table toys).
- Children are given smocks for artwork and water play so that they can express themselves without fear of getting soiled.
- Protected floor space is clearly defined and out of the line of traffic so that children can build with blocks.
- The outdoor area is fenced in and protected.
- Attractive displays of materials invite children to use them.

- Toys are rotated periodically so there is always something new to interest children.

Identifying Problems Possibly Caused by Room Arrangement

Even when teachers focus on the physical environment, things do not always go according to plan. There are times when no matter how hard teachers try, children seem restless. They may fight over toys, wander about, become easily distracted, or use materials roughly.

Although there are, of course, many possible reasons for such behaviors, the room arrangement may be one contributing factor. This is likely to be true if such behavior becomes habitual for many children in the group. The following chart presents possible environmental causes for children's restless or disruptive behavior and identifies strategies for rearranging the space to correct and prevent further recurrences of the problem.

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE CAUSES	HOW TO CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT
Running in the classroom.	Too much open space; room not divided into smaller areas.	Use shelves and furniture to divide the space.
Fighting over toys.	Few duplicate toys; children asked to share too often.	Provide duplicates of toys. Show children when it will be their turn (e.g., use a timer with a bell, a sand timer, or a list with names of children waiting for their turn.)
Wandering around; unable to choose activities.	Room too cluttered; choices not clear; not enough to do.	Get rid of clutter. Simplify the layout of the room and materials. Add more activity choices.
Easily distracted; trouble staying with a task and completing it.	Areas undefined and open; children can see everything going on in the room.	Use shelves to define areas so children are not distracted by other activities.
Materials used roughly; resistance to clean-up.	Materials on shelves are messy; no order to display of materials.	Make a place for everything. Use picture labels to show where materials go.

Organizing Outdoor Space

Like the indoor classroom, the outdoor play area helps set the pace for learning. It, too, can be divided into interest areas. Teachers can use both surfaces and equipment to invite different kinds of activities. While outdoor areas are usually regarded as places for children to develop large muscle control, with planning, the outdoor area can be used for many types of activities. Here are some examples of ways in which the outdoor area can be utilized for learning.

- In warm weather, a low table can be used for water play, finger painting, clay, or play dough.
- A large tractor tire, hung vertically by three strong ropes or chains, can make a swing large enough for two or three children.

- Cable spools from the telephone company can be used for climbing.
- Boxes and planks can be moved around to make different, interesting constructions.
- A pet rabbit can be kept outdoors in a wire cage, tended to by children on a rotating basis.
- A garden can be planted and cared for by children.

Making Outdoor Play Areas Work

When planning an outdoor area or evaluating one currently in use, consider the following guidelines.

- The area should be arranged so that the total space for play is defined; children need to know where the play area begins and ends.
- The equipment should be scaled to size for the children who will use it.
- There should be a balance between materials, equipment, and space that fosters both individual and group play.
- The equipment should be arranged so that the teacher's view of children is unobstructed.

What If There Is No Outdoor Play Area?

Not all preschool programs have their own outdoor play area adjacent to the classroom. Many programs rely on public parks and playgrounds for outdoor play. Teachers in these programs should consider these questions before selecting a public area for use by their preschool.

- Is the playground well-maintained? Is equipment in good repair? Is the ground free of litter and debris?
- Is the play equipment appropriate for the age of the children?
- Is the playground close enough to the preschool that children can walk there without becoming too tired to play?
- Are there tables at the playground for quiet activities, such as reading or drawing?
- Is there a water fountain? If so, is it scaled to size for children?

- Does the playground have clearly defined boundaries so that children know where they can and cannot play?

Because the physical environment provides the setting in which children can thrive and learn, thoughtful arrangement of indoor and outdoor spaces is a basic element of the *Creative Curriculum*. Teachers who make effective use of the physical environment find that they have more time to interact with children and to promote learning. The next section explores those interactions and focuses on the teacher's role in implementing the curriculum.

IV. The Teacher's Role in Implementing the Creative Curriculum

The learning environment is designed to meet the developmental needs of children and to foster exploration, creativity, and independence. The teacher's role is to ensure that this process is sustained continually.

Observing Children

First and foremost, teachers must be careful observers. They need to know what materials children typically select, how children use these materials, and how children relate to their peers. With access to such information, teachers can make developmentally appropriate decisions about how to best reinforce children's learning.

When observing children, most teachers find it helpful to collect data that help them learn more both about individual children and about how a group works together. Teachers should look for answers to the questions that follow.

How Children Select Materials

- What toys do children play with?
- Which interest areas and materials are selected most often? Which least often?
- Do children select the same, similar, or different materials daily?
- Do children show a gender-related preference for particular materials or toys?

How Children Use Materials

- What do children actually do with the selected materials?
- What innovative and creative uses are discovered for materials?
- Which types of materials seem to stimulate dramatic play? Group play? Individual play?
- Do different children play differently with the same materials?
- Which materials hold children's interest the longest? Which do not seem to hold children's attention?
- How does the selection of materials change over the course of the year?

- Are there enough materials to keep children occupied?
- Does the traffic pattern permit children to play in safety?

How Children Interact with Peers and Adults

- How do children socialize? Do they approach others or wait to be invited?
- Which children play together most often?
- How do children ask for help from adults? From peers?
- Which play experiences seem to foster cooperative play? Solitary play?

How Children Demonstrate Thinking Skills During Play

- How do children respond to requests for recalling experiences?
- Which objects, attributes, and actions can children identify?
- Are children able to predict cause and effect?
- How do children compare and classify objects?
- How do children identify solutions to problems?
- How do children express thoughts and feelings?

To discover the answers to these questions, teachers must observe carefully and systematically. This involves watching, listening to, and recording what children do and say as it happens, according to a particular method. One effective approach is anecdotal recordkeeping. An anecdote is a short account of some happening. With this method, teachers observe children for brief periods as they arrive in the morning, play indoors and outdoors, eat, prepare to nap and wake up, and leave at the end of the day. Then the teachers make and document a series of short (five- to ten-minute) observations to provide the information needed to assess a child's level of development in all three areas: cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical. Teachers record these observations during regular activities as children interact with their environment, their peers, and adults.

To be complete, anecdotal records should include the following:

- the child's name;
- the date of the observation;

- the setting (where the activity is taking place and who is involved); and
- the behavior (what the child does and says).

Over time, anecdotal records can provide teachers with a picture of each child's

- preferred learning style (active, quiet, solitary, etc.);
- ability to select activities;
- relationships with other children and adults;
- temperament;
- understanding of limits;
- expressive and receptive language skills; and
- strengths, interests, and needs.

In addition to anecdotal records, many teachers find it helpful to use observational checklists to help them assess each child's developmental level. Typically, these checklists focus on specific skills achieved by children at particular ages. Teachers check for these skills by observing children during regular classroom and outdoor activities.

The key to any method of observation--be it anecdotal recordkeeping or checklists--is that it must be objective and accurate. All the facts about what a child does and says must be noted in the order in which they happen. Moreover, in recording observations, teachers should avoid making judgments or using labels.

A total picture of the group and of each child is more easily obtained if teachers take time to periodically share their observations and records. Each adult has a unique viewpoint and set of records. Another teacher's observations can sometimes be helpful in formulating a picture of the whole child. By sharing and discussing the information gathered, teachers can use the insights they gain to (1) reinforce and expand each child's play, (2) respond to each child's needs and interests, and (3) individualize their program.

Reinforcing Children's Play

One of the primary ways in which teachers can use the information they gather from observing children in the environment is to validate and reinforce children's play. The process of reinforcement involves several strategies. First, teachers should convey to children that what they are doing has value. This may be done by describing what they observe, asking open-ended questions, and encouraging children to take the next step. These techniques are illustrated below.

- **Describing what children are doing:** "I see you have used all the square blocks today." Or, "You mixed the blue and yellow paint together, and look what you made--green!" Or, "I see you're having trouble getting that wet sand to go through the funnel."
- **Asking children to describe what they are doing:** "You've been working in the block corner a long time today. Tell me about the building you've made." Or, "You really seem to like the shells we collected. Tell me all you learned about them."
- **Asking questions that invite children to examine their own work and look for new possibilities:** "Your car is a long way from the gas station. What will happen if it runs out of gas?" Or, "That play dough looks very sticky today. What could you add to it to make it work better?"
- **Asking questions that encourage children to put together their information in order to arrive at an answer:** "Which of these bottle caps is the same as the one you put in the cup? How is it the same?" Or, "What do you think will happen if we hang all the dress-up clothes on one hanger?"
- **Asking questions that help children look for many possible ideas or solutions to problems:** "What are some different ways we can use play dough in the house corner?" Or, "What might happen if we all tried to climb to the top of the jungle gym?"
- **Asking questions that encourage children to explore their feelings and emotions:** "I think you're happy with the mobile you made. Tell me what you like best about it." Or, "How do you think Ira feels about sleeping overnight at a friend's house?"

Because they do not require one correct answer, the open-ended questions and statements just illustrated are designed to reinforce children's play and encourage their thinking.

However, there are times when teachers need to assess a child's level of knowledge to determine what information that child has acquired. Questions such as "what color is this?" or "do you know the name of this shape?" can legitimately be asked during one-on-one activities. Children should not, however, be placed in situations where they might feel incompetent in front of their peers. Moreover, such questions should be asked only when the teacher wants to determine if a child has acquired a particular piece of information or knowledge. They are not questions designed to expand children's thinking. Children who have had many concrete experiences with color and shape and who hear the words describing these attributes will learn vocabulary through everyday experiences. If a child has played with blocks, house corner props, and art media but has not volunteered the names for shapes, colors, or quantity, teachers can determine that child's level of knowledge by asking questions for which there is only one right answer.

Extending and Enriching Children's Play

Because learning is a dynamic process, the teacher's role in the *Creative Curriculum* is to be responsive to children's changing needs and interests. Periodically, teachers need to enhance and alter the learning environment in order to provide new experiences, challenge the children's abilities, and respond to their growing interests. This is accomplished by doing the following:

- adding new materials, equipment, and props to the various interest areas;
- asking questions, offering suggestions, and answering questions in order to expand children's play experiences;
- bringing in outside resources, such as visitors and people with special talents, to generate new ideas that children can use in play; and
- taking children on field trips that expand their areas of interest.

The individual modules of the *Creative Curriculum* describe in detail how the teacher can extend and enrich the environment in each interest area. Here are some examples.

Block Corner

- Wooden airplanes, helicopters, and Legos for building spaceships are added to the block corner in response to the children's interest in transportation play.
- As the children are building, the teacher says: "This airport looks like a busy place. Where do people park their cars when they come to get on a plane?"

Table Toy Area

- Noting that the children have mastered the puzzles put out in the beginning of the year, the teacher leaves out some of their favorites but adds new ones that are at the next level of difficulty.
- While the children are playing with manipulatives, the teacher says: "I see you have used all the red and yellow crystal climbers."

Art Area

- The art area includes a rich variety of materials to stimulate creativity and experimentation--for instance, white paint to mix with colors to create pastels, a different type of clay or modeling dough, and colored chalk to use with liquid starch.

- When the children are painting, the teacher says: "You made a lot of new colors by mixing the paints. Would you like to tell me about your painting?"

Library Corner

- Books displayed are both age-appropriate and individually appropriate for the children. The books are changed regularly as teachers pick up on new interests expressed by the children, such as transportation modes or animals. The teacher selects new books that can expand play; for example, if the children in the house corner have been playing doctor and hospital, books on these subjects are added to the library corner.

- When the children are in the library corner, the teacher may say, "I have a new story tape I think you'll like. It's about one of your favorite books."

House Corner

- Prop boxes that stimulate dramatic play--doctor, grocery store, office--are stored and brought out in response to the children's interests.

- When the children are playing in the house corner, the teacher might say: "Here's a box with some things a doctor might use to care for patients." Or the teacher might ask: "Would you like a magazine to look at while you wait to see the doctor?"

Sand and Water Area

- Objects such as funnels, tubes, cups, shovels, and water wheels are located in the sand and water area to encourage the children to explore the properties of these materials.

- When the children are playing at the water table, the teacher may ask: "What could you use to get the water to go into that little opening in the bottle without spilling?"

Outdoor Area

- The outdoor environment offers a rich resource for encouraging children's growth and development in all areas. Activities are planned for each day, and the children go outside at least once a day.
- Teachers help the children plant and care for a garden. A teacher may say: "Look at how many of our seeds have started growing. It looks pretty dry. What do you think our garden needs?"

Individualizing the Curriculum

Another reason for observing and recording children's interactions in the environment is to individualize the program. Individualization is central to the *Creative Curriculum.* It is the practical application of a philosophy that recognizes, values, and plans for differences in how children develop and the rate at which growth occurs. In any group of preschool children, some children will be able to use scissors and some won't; some will be very verbal and some will have a limited vocabulary; some will be scribbling and others will be making representational drawings; some will use the props in the house corner to role-play experiences they have had and others will use the props simply as toys. Individualizing means recognizing and allowing for differences in development and personality when planning activities so that there is sufficient variety to meet the needs and interests of each child.

The *Creative Curriculum* also facilitates mainstreaming children with disabilities into the program. Children with disabilities usually follow the same developmental progress as their peers. Sometimes a skill has to be taught in smaller steps or practiced longer for the child to achieve success. Since the *Creative Curriculum* focuses on children's individual development and interests, it allows teachers to adapt the environment and materials to match children's needs. For example, if a child with moderate mental retardation is enrolled, materials will have to be selected to match his or her skill level. Rules of games may need to be changed to allow all children to play together.

The most important thing to remember when teaching a child with a disability is that he is first a child with the same needs and desires as others, and also many have some speical needs. In order for everyone to feel comfortable with the child, teachers should find out as much as they can about the child's specific disability from the parents and physician, so they can appropriately individualize activities, as well as effectively integrate the child into the total program.

Children not only have unique patterns of development but also come with their own interests, experiences, and learning styles. Some children love to play with cars; others prefer expressing their ideas through art materials. Some are fascinated by fire engines and all sorts of large vehicles; others may not have one major interest but will be responsive to whatever new materials and experiences are offered. Individualizing means that teachers know each child's preferences and interests and use this information to create a learning environment appropriate for each child. Individualization requires that teachers plan daily activities that promote individual growth by building on each child's interests.

Individualizing is also one of the best strategies for promoting positive behavior. Children who are interested in the activities offered, and who are appropriately challenged, rarely misbehave. When children are bored or frustrated, behavior problems are more likely to occur.

Ongoing observation of children enables teachers to individualize the program for each child. Anecdotal records, work samples, assessment results, interviews with parents, and other relevant data also help teachers to individualize each child's program. To keep all this information in a helpful form, teachers should maintain a file on each child. Included in each file might be the following:

- several observations that note the date, time, place, and a description of behaviors observed;
- descriptions of the quantity and quality of the child's interaction with teachers, other children, and staff;
- comments on the child's physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development;
- samples of the child's work;
- specific objectives to be achieved; and
- activities planned for the child.

Collecting this information is the first step in individualizing the program; teachers must then use this information to meet individual needs. To illustrate how this would work, let's suppose that observational records reveal that a particular child, Kim, rarely selects an activity on her own. Kim's teacher might try the following strategies to individualize the program:

- talking with Kim quietly each morning to discuss the various choices of activities and help her select one she'd like to try;
- setting up a system whereby children have a picture or card to put on a planning board to indicate where they wish to play; and
- planning an activity to involve Kim and inviting her to ask one or two other children to join in.

To take another example, suppose a teacher finds that several children are having trouble using scissors. The teacher might plan activities to help strengthen small muscles, such as picking up objects with tongs, molding clay, and playing with manipulative toys such as pegboards and tinker toys.

One of the most effective ways in which teachers individualize the program is by providing developmentally appropriate choices for children every day. In this way, children learn to decide which interest areas and activities they like best, to select materials of interest to them, and to decide how long to spend in an interest area or with a given material.

Giving children opportunities to make choices fosters independence and creativity. It is a cornerstone of the philosophy underlying the *Creative Curriculum.*

Helping Children Learn Social Skills

Another role that the teacher plays is that of helping children learn to work well in a group. To learn social skills, children need to develop a willingness to share and an ability to resolve conflicts.

Helping Children Learn to Share

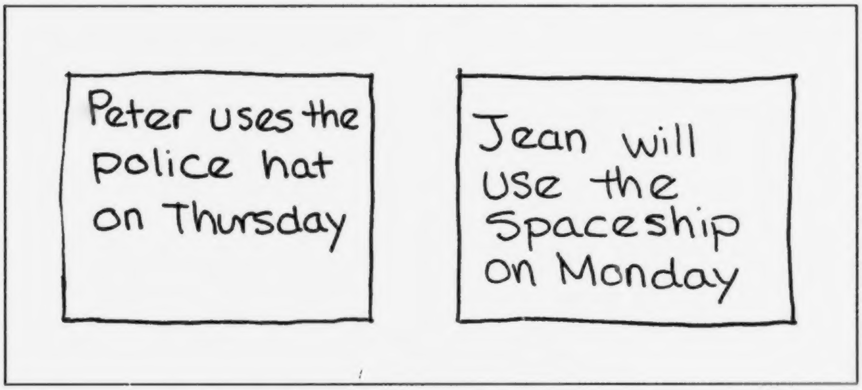
As every early childhood education teacher knows, learning to share materials is difficult for young children, especially at the start of the year. Even when there is a sufficient supply of materials, young children still find it difficult to wait for their favorite puzzle or truck.

One of the best ways to encourage children to share is to help them see for themselves the rewards inherent in sharing. When children play together successfully and work cooperatively on a joint project, they naturally learn to share. Encouraging children to play together is one way of promoting sharing.

Part of learning to share is learning to wait for a turn. For young children, having to wait five minutes for a turn can seem an eternity. It isn't only that the child is impatient; young children really have no idea of how long a minute is. The following strategies can help children deal with time in concrete terms they can understand.

- Bring a kitchen timer with a bell to the classroom. The sound can be used to alert children to when their time is up.
- Have children use an egg timer with sand in it to determine their turns.
- Post a waiting list in interest areas. Older children can write their own names on the list with the teacher's help. Children can then see for themselves how many children will have a turn before it is their own. When they are finished with their turns, they can then cross their names off the waiting list.
- Have children track the passage of time by watching a clock's hands move. The teacher should point out that "when the big hand gets to the three, it will be your turn."

In addition to these suggestions, one method advocated by the *Creative Curriculum* to help children learn to share is that of sign writing. Sign writing can resolve some typical sharing problems that four- and five-year-olds experience. Often, children may want to use the same materials in an interest area day after day. Teachers may hear "he always uses the spaceship, I never get a turn" or "she always wears the police hat, I never do." Such sharing problems can be resolved by making a sign that says who will have a turn with a particular prop on a given day. Sign writing tells children that the teacher feels their requests are legitimate and assures them that they will eventually get a turn.


Peter uses the police hat on Thursday
Jean will use the Spaceship on Monday

Helping Children Resolve Conflicts

Teachers need to establish rules and behavioral expectations for the classroom so that it will be a safe and secure place in which children can play and learn. These rules also enable children to learn to control their behavior and to express negative feelings in socially acceptable ways.

Self-control is an important goal for children. Learning to think and act independently and to express feelings in appropriate ways are equally important. In teaching these behaviors, it is important for the teacher to do the following:

- recognize children's feelings;
- reason with children;
- help children develop problem-solving skills;
- teach children to use words rather than to act out their feelings when they are upset; and
- listen for the real messages in what children are saying.

These techniques are part of an approach referred to in the early childhood literature as "problem solving." When children are given the tools with which to solve their own disputes, they learn to take responsibility for their behavior. Children are taught to "use their words," as the following example illustrates:

First child:	"He hit me!"
Teacher:	"Tell him you don't like it when he hits you."
Second child:	"Well, she took my truck."
Teacher:	"The next time someone takes your truck, tell that person you are using it and that he or she can have it when you are done. We don't allow hitting in this class."
First child:	"I want to use that truck."
Teacher:	(To both children) "Let's go set the timer." (To the second child) "When the bell rings, you'll know it's your turn for the truck."

In this way, with practice, children learn an important class rule: no one hits in the class. They also learn a substitute way of dealing with disagreement: talking about it. Experience has shown that in classes where this approach is used, children learn to handle their disputes on their own. Of course, there are times when they come to the teacher for help, but they are learning to resolve problems in an acceptable way on their own.

As with teaching sharing skills, problem-solving skills can be enhanced by writing signs to confirm the agreed-upon solution. For example, in a dispute over a truck, one child's sign may read "Sandi will play with the red truck today" or "Kevin will have the red truck tomorrow."

Using signs this way can be very effective. They promote social development and cooperation because children ask each other what their signs mean. Some children may even take to wearing their signs. Others may simply post their signs on the walls. Even a child who can't read can be proud of his or her sign, memorizing its content. Signs are, of course, also important for language experience and reading readiness skills.

A primary goal of the *Creative Curriculum* is to clarify and describe the teacher's role in creating and using an environment for learning. Each of the modules defines in detail how teachers can provide rich interest areas and what they can say and do to promote learning and growth. Just as the indoor and outdoor environments provide the physical structure for the program, the daily schedule, routines, and plans provide the temporal structure. This latter structure is the focus of the next section.

V. Planning the Daily Program

In the *Creative Curriculum*, planning is an essential organizing tool. Planning involves designing a daily schedule appropriate for the abilities of the children in the class. It means allocating time for teachers and other adults working in the classroom to meet regularly to assess how children are responding to the environment and activities and to decide what changes should be made. Planning also involves scheduling daily routines and activities to ensure that the program runs smoothly.

The Daily Schedule

The daily schedule outlines the day's events. It gives specific times when activities are to occur and helps the teacher organize the day. A good schedule takes into account the age of the children in the group, the number of adults working with the group, and the length of the program day. The schedule also reflects specific program characteristics, such as the number and types of meals served, the layout of the indoor and outdoor environments, and whether transportation time needs to be accommodated.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the daily schedule supports the entire learning program. It offers a balance between the following:

- active and quiet times;
- large group activities, small group activities, and times for children to play alone;
- indoor and outdoor play times; and
- times for children to select materials and for teachers to direct activities.

An appropriate daily schedule also accounts for daily routines and transition times, including:

- arrival and departure;
- meals and snacks;
- sleeping/resting;
- self-help skills such as toileting, dressing to go outdoors, and learning to wash hands;
- clean-up; and
- transitions from one activity to another.

Including these routines and transition times in the daily schedule acknowledges their importance; planning ensures that adequate time for them will be provided.

Consistency is an important characteristic of the daily routine. Young children feel more secure when they can predict the sequence of events and have some control over their day. They delight in reminding the teacher that "snack comes next" or telling a visitor that "now we go outside." In addition, predictability provides children with a rudimentary sense of time, as they begin to learn what comes first in the day, second, next, and last. A consistent schedule also helps build trust in the environment.

Consistency does not, however, preclude flexibility or spontaneity. A special occurrence can be reason enough to alter the daily routine. For example, the sight of a snowfall can alter class plans. Similarly, on a day when an activity is especially successful or when children are engrossed in an activity of their choosing, extra time can be allotted by eliminating or shortening another activity. Children can be told, "You are enjoying building in the block area so much today that we will extend free play a while longer."

As with all aspects of the *Creative Curriculum*, schedules should be developmentally appropriate. Waiting times should be kept to a mininum and adequate time allotted for putting on coats and hats, eating meals and snacks, and cleaning up. Free play periods should be long enough to give children time to select materials and activities, plan what they want to do, and clean up afterward without feeling rushed.

The following schedule is offered as an example. It is adaptable to either full-day or part-day programs. It takes into account the needs of both children and teachers and recognizes differences among programs.

EARLY-MORNING SCHEDULE

7:30-8:15 a.m.	CHILDREN ARRIVE: Free play periods in classrooms; children and teachers prepare for breakfast.
8:15-8:45 a.m.	BREAKFAST AND CLEAN-UP: As children finish breakfast, they read books or listen to music until free play begins.*

---

*This routine will depend on where children eat breakfast. If they eat in their individual classrooms, they can move directly from eating to the free play period. If they eat in another room, as is assumed in the example, there needs to be a transition activity, such as looking at books, until all children are through with breakfast.

MORNING SCHEDULE

8:45-9:00 a.m.	GROUP TIME**: Conversation and sharing time; music, movement, or rhythms; fingerplays.
9:00-10:00 a.m.	FREE PLAY: Children select from one of the interest areas: Art Blocks Library Corner Table Toys House Corner Sand and Water
10:00-10:15 a.m.	CLEAN-UP: Children put away toys and materials; as they finish, they select a book to read or move directly into the group time activity.
10:15-10:30 a.m.**	STORY TIME: Depending on the age of of the children, there is one large group or two smaller groups for story reading.
10:30-10:50 a.m.	SNACK AND PREPARATION TO GO OUTDOORS
10:50-11:45 a.m.	OUTDOOR PLAY: Children select from climbing activities, wheel toys, balls, hoops, sand and water play, woodworking, gardening, and child-initiated games.
11:45-12:00 noon	QUIET TIME AND PREPARING TO GO HOME (for morning programs): Children select a book or listen to tapes while small groups put on coats and prepare to leave.

**The length of group and story time should vary with the ages of the children. A group of three-year-olds, or three- and four-year-olds with limited group experiences may have difficulty participating in a 15-minute group time. A shorter activity could be planned and lengthened during the year as children's abilities to interact with the group expand.

LUNCH AND REST

12:00-12:45 p.m.	PREPARE FOR LUNCH, EAT LUNCH, CLEAN UP: As children finish lunch, they go to the bathroom in small groups and then read books on their cots in preparation for nap time.
12:45-1:00 p.m.	QUIET ACTIVITY PRIOR TO NAP: Story, song by teacher, quiet music, or story record.
1:00-3:00 p.m.	NAPTIME: As children wake, they read books or play quiet games such as puzzles or lotto on their cots; children who do not sleep or who awaken early are taken into another room for free play with books, table toys, and other quiet activities.

AFTERNOON SCHEDULE

3:00-3:30 p.m.	SNACK AND PREPARATION TO GO OUTDOORS
3:30-4:30 p.m.	OUTDOOR PLAY: Children select from climbing activities, wheel toys, balls, hoops, sand and water play, woodworking, gardening, and child-initiated games.
4:30-5:15 p.m.	FREE PLAY: Children select from art (activity requiring minimal clean-up time), blocks, house corner, library corner, and table toys.
5:15-6:00 p.m.	CLEAN-UP AND SMALL-GROUP QUIET TIME: After snack and until children leave, teacher plans quiet activities such as table toys; songs, fingerplays, or music; stories; and coloring. Older children might help teachers prepare materials for the next day.

Adapting the Daily Schedule

The sample schedule is offered as a model of one that is appropriate for a developmentally based program. Adaptations to this schedule are, of course, encouraged, as the goal of program development is to individualize the program whenever possible. The following are some adaptations that teachers might wish to consider.

- **Bathroom Time:** When a classroom has its own bathroom, children can use it freely as needed. When the bathroom is down a hall outside the room, procedures for using the bathroom must be established to ensure children's safety.

- **Morning Programs:** For half-day programs, some teachers prefer to begin the day with a group activity followed by a free play period. Where children travel long distances and arrive at different times, it may be best to begin with free play. This allows children to select an activity they are ready for when they arrive.

- **Snacks:** In some programs, snacks are provided cafeteria-style. A nutritious snack, such as juice and crackers or fruit, is placed on a table for a half-hour period, usually during free play. Children help themselves to the snack when they are hungry. For programs with a very short morning, a cafeteria-style snack is especially appealing, since it maximizes flexibility.

- **Late Afternoon Programs:** Children are very often tired at the end of the day. Depending on the number of adults available, it may be helpful to divide the children into small groups. One teacher can then read to the group while another teacher supervises table toys. It may also be necessary to have a space where an extremely tired child can rest until it is time to go home. A small snack, such as juice and crackers or fruit, may be offered to children who remain until 6 p.m.

Weekly and Long-Term Planning

Planning helps teachers implement the curriculum by translating goals for children into developmentally appropriate learning experiences. It enables teachers to keep track of what is going on in the classroom, where progress is made, and where change may be necessary.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the planning process itself is considered valuable. By working together, teachers and volunteers can exchange ideas, share observations of the children, and discuss new strategies. The written plans that result provide a record of the curriculum over a period of time. Such plans help teachers chart the progress of individual children and the group as a whole. This in turn helps determine if program goals and objectives are being met.

Observation facilitates planning. Through observation, teachers can see if the materials provided have the desired outcomes. For example, what happens when road signs are added to the block corner? Did the props stimulate a new or different type of dramatic play? What types of props might be added to extend a new theme? This approach addresses the teacher's need not only to plan but also to note the results of what is planned so that adjustments can be made.

Because the *Creative Curriculum* is environmentally based, the goal of planning is to create cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical learning opportunities in each of the interest areas. This means determining which materials and props should be available to children and which strategies teachers should use to extend and enrich children's play. Whatever planning form teachers use, it should address the specific areas and time periods that need to be considered each day. The weekly planning form that follows is offered as a suggestion; it can be modified to suit individual programs.

SAMPLE WEEKLY PLANNING FORM

Week Of: ______________________ Special Focus/Theme: ______________________

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Group time (songs, stories, games)					
Special small group activities					
Outdoor activities					

Changes to the environment	House Corner	Art	Sand and Water
	Blocks	Table Toys	Library Corner
Target children (for specific strengths, interests, or needs)			

Teachers also need to look ahead and plan special activities related to classroom themes that require advance planning. For example, trips to the zoo, or visits to the local museum or library in coordination with a focus on zoo animals, all require advance coordination.

Long-term planning is needed for both field trips and special events. Community calendars can alert teachers to activities appropriate for young children. In many cases, long-range planning is needed for budget concerns: the cost of field trips needs to be factored in, the purchase of special materials accounted for, and the direct and indirect costs of special events allocated.

Planning also enables teachers to collect and prepare the materials needed for a particular activity or concept. For example, putting together a prop box for the house corner to stimulate hospital play requires advance preparation. Finding specific resources such as library books, posters, or collections for science may also require advance time and effort. Locating a parent who is willing to share a special interest or talent similarly needs to be done ahead of time.

Units and Themes in the Creative Curriculum

Some early childhood curriculum models are organized by units and themes such as "Community Helpers," "Farm Animals," and "Getting Ready for Winter." Teachers using this approach plan activities around these themes to help children learn new concepts and develop new skills.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the focus is on the environment where learning takes place. Units or themes still have a place in the *Creative Curriculum*, but the emphasis is on designing ways in which concepts and understandings can be acquired through activities that take place in each of the interest areas.

Teachers using the *Creative Curriculum* select themes on the basis of what they know of the community and the interests of the children, not because the curriculum dictates that it is time for the children to learn about farm animals. This means that curriculum themes used by teachers in Alaska might be quite different from those selected by teachers in rural Virginia or a large inner-city program in Chicago. In Alaska, themes might include "The Life of a Salmon" because children see the salmon every year, dramatically swimming upstream. "Living in the Dark" might be another natural choice for a theme because in Alaskan winters there is so little daylight. These themes would be less appropriate for children in rural Virginia or Chicago.

Thus, themes or units must begin with what children know and see every day. An animal theme in an Alaskan program would focus on seals, whales, walruses, puffins, mountain sheep, huskies, caribou, bears, and moose. The same theme in a rural farming community would focus on cows, horses, chickens, pigs, and geese. In an urban program with access to a zoo, the range of animals that children can see and learn about is vast. Teachers in each of these locations would select very different animals to represent in the pictures they display, the books they read, the props they put in the block corner, and the activities they plan.

The content of the curriculum thus begins with the "here and now": the environment that the children know firsthand. As children acquire a better understanding of their world, new ideas can be introduced to help children understand and appreciate differences. For example, children in Washington, DC, learning about changes in the weather in winter can be introduced to the concept that in Alaska, there are only a few hours of sunlight in winter, and even while children are in school it is dark outside.

This environment-specific approach also supports the flexibility--not usually offered in a unit-based curriculum--to create new themes in response to the new (and often unexpected) interests of children. Suppose, for example, that a large construction project is initiated close to the preschool program. Large machinery is brought in to dig the foundation; pipes are laid and the foundation walls begin to go up, all to the group's fascination. Naturally, teachers can incorporate this interest into the curriculum by making regular visits to the construction site and talking to the children about what changes they notice. They might also enrich the preschool environment to extend learning around this theme by doing the following:

- displaying pictures of how buildings are constructed;
- adding bulldozers, tubes, backhoes, ramps, derricks, and construction workers to the block corner;
- adding hard hats, lunch boxes, carpenter aprons, work boots, and work shirts to the house corner;
- displaying books in the library corner that illustrate construction work;
- including construction materials in the table toy area, such as Legos and table blocks;
- planning a group mural of the building going up so that children can "build" a representation of the building as it grows; and
- taking photographs of the construction site to illustrate the changes and having the children develop a story based on the photos.

As children use the materials in the room, teachers can talk to them about what they have learned, help them to represent their new knowledge using concrete materials, and assist them in extending their play to acquire new understandings.

The Role of Free Play in the Creative Curriculum

The concept of free play is basic to the *Creative Curriculum*. Whether it is called "free choice," "work play," "child-selected activities," or "child-initiated activities," free play is scheduled into the day's program. During this time, children can select activities throughout the classroom in the various interest areas: blocks, art, table toys, house corner, sand and water, or library corner. Children are free to select as many activities as they want or to spend all their time in one area or at one activity.

During free play, teachers also use the interest areas to present and reinforce specific concepts. For example, if one of the skills being addressed during a particular week is seriation, teachers might:

- set out nesting cups and stacking rings in the table toy area;
- include large and small pots and pans and cooking utensils in the house corner;
- emphasize the sequence of steps in implementing a cooking activity with a group of children;
- talk with children about size differences in the block area during clean-up; and
- select cups of four different sizes to put in the water table.

As children elect to play in an area using these materials, teachers talk with them about the concepts they are experiencing firsthand.

Free play also occurs during outdoor play time, allowing children to select from the materials, equipment, and natural resources available outdoors. As with indoor free play, children may choose to play alone or with a group of children.

Circle Time

Circle time provides an opportunity for children to learn to share and to listen to others. It can be a time to practice many social skills that are an important part of group interaction.

Circle times are successful when the activities planned are age-appropriate and the amount of time allotted takes into account the children's attention spans, interests, and abilities. Children most enjoy group activities they can participate in directly, such as storytelling, fingerplays, music/movement activities, exercises, and games.

The following guidelines are offered for planning circle time activities.

- Whenever possible, divide a large group into two smaller groups; this allows for more participation.
- Schedule circle times for 10- to 15-minute periods; if an activity is especially successful, it can always be continued or repeated later in the day.
- Use smooth, orderly transitions to ease children in and out of group activities.
- Use the activity itself to help gather the children together; for instance, begin singing a song to bring the children to the area.

- Avoid activities such as demonstrations or lengthy discussions where the children sit for long periods listening to the teacher without interaction.

- Give children clear, simple directions about the activity and what they are expected to do.

- Be prepared to change, shorten, or eliminate a group activity that just isn't working.

- Be prepared to extend an activity that is working.

Evaluate circle times to see which activities are most successful. How children behave during and after an activity is a good indicator of its success. Watch for cues from children to evaluate the effectiveness of the activity. If they all seem restless, it may be too long; if several children are not paying attention or annoying their neighbors, the activity may not be holding their interest. Such observations tell a teacher that it's time to change or end the activity.

Transition Times

Attention to transition times is an important part of classroom management. Like all activities, transition times can be used for learning and reinforcing concepts and skills. Teachers generally find that by allowing for transitions in the daily schedule and by including children in the process, behavior problems decrease and constructive activities increase. If transition times are a problem, teachers should consider the following questions:

- Do the children have sufficient notice that a transition time is coming?

- Are transition times treated as an important activity, or are they rushed? Are they too long?

- Do children know what is expected of them during transitions?

- Is everyone expected to do things at the same time, or are allowances made for individual differences?

There are several ways in which teachers can maximize the chances that transitions will run smoothly.

- Try to avoid having all children move from one activity to another as a group. For example, as individual children finish their snack, they can get a book to read until everyone is ready to go outside. Or, as children finish in the bathroom, they can return to the classroom to put on their coats.

- Give children notice prior to clean-up time: "You have time for one more puzzle" or "There is just enough time to finish that painting, but not to start a new one."

- Treat clean-up time as an experience that is valuable in and of itself, and allow sufficient time so children won't feel rushed.

- Involve children in setting up for a snack or lunch, cleaning up after art, and collecting trash after a meal. This not only smooths the transition but also teaches children responsibility.

- Provide clear directions to children during transition times and be sure that the expectations are age-appropriate. Keep the same routine each day so that children know what to do on their own.

- Be flexible, when possible, by allowing children extra time to complete special projects or activities in which they are particularly involved. For example, if several of the children have spent all of free play building a "city" and need time to complete it, allow them this extra time. Other children can be asked to help clean up the art area or house corner.

Making Mealtimes Enjoyable for Young Children

Mealtimes, like other scheduled activities, are exceptionally good learning times. Through the experiences of having meals, children begin to serve themselves, to eat with a group, and to try new foods. Most importantly, children develop attitudes about food and nutrition.

There are many things teachers can do to make mealtimes enjoyable and to foster positive attitudes about food and nutrition. First, it is important to remember that children--like adults--have individual eating patterns, likes and dislikes, and home experiences with mealtimes that must be respected. With young children the emphasis should be on eating and relaxing with the group rather than on forcing children to try particular foods. Table manners, too, are secondary with this age group. Children will learn to use utensils and napkins as their skills develop. They will also learn by watching others, which is one reason why it is valuable for teachers to sit with children during mealtimes.

Here are some suggestions for making mealtimes enjoyable.

Make Mealtimes Sociable

- Try to establish a calm and pleasant atmosphere. A quiet activity, such as a story before lunch, helps set a quiet tone.

- Encourage children to talk about what they are eating, how the food is prepared, or something of a solely social nature. Pleasant conversation will create a comfortable atmosphere.

- Organize mealtimes so that teachers do not have to keep jumping up from the table. This behavior is disruptive and causes children to do the same. To minimize the need for teachers to leave the table, keep extra foods on a cart near the table and have extra napkins, sponges, and paper cups nearby.

- Allow children enough time to eat. Some children are slow eaters. Mealtime should not be rushed. Ample time should be allotted for setting up, eating, and cleaning up.

Encourage Children to Help

- Children can assist teachers: they can set the table, sponge the table after eating, and pass a trash can around.

- Furnish the meal area with small plastic pitchers, baskets, and sturdy serving utensils that children can use to pour their own milk or juice and serve their own food. Give children time to practice with the pitchers during water play, and be tolerant of spills and accidents.

Refrain from Using Food as a Reward or Punishment

- Food becomes a means of manipulation when it is used to reward or punish behavior. Avoid promises or threats involving food. It is especially important that children not be threatened with having a snack or meal taken away. If a child acts out during a meal, the best response is to deal with the inappropriate behavior and sit near the child or separate the child from the group.

- Talk with parents about their child's eating habits, food preferences, and what mealtime is like at home. Share with parents the goals for mealtime at school and encourage parents to suggest foods they know their child enjoys.

Naptime

Most full-day-care programs have an afternoon nap period for approximately two hours. This gives children a chance to rest and prepare themselves for the afternoon and early evening program.

Because naps are often associated with home, many children have a difficult time with this activity. This is normal and to be expected, especially with preschool children.

In planning naptime, it is helpful to remember that all children have different sleep patterns and different ways of falling asleep: some drop off right away, some need to suck their thumb or a pacifier to relax, and others keep their eyes open until the very last minute, reluctant to miss a single thing that may be going on. Teachers may find that each child in the group needs something different to help bring on sleep.

Here are some suggestions for naptime:

- Assign a cot and a specific area for each child.
- Allow children to bring sleep toys or special blankets from home to use at naptime. These objects can be stored in the child's cubby and brought out by the child at naptime. Children should not be teased about needing these things; they will give them up when they are ready.
- Plan a quiet activity for the group right before naptime, such as a story, fingerplay, quiet song, or soft music.
- Allow children to settle down at their own pace. Children should not be forced to sleep but encouraged to relax. Sleep usually follows. It often helps to circulate throughout the nap area, rub a child's back, or just sit on a cot near a restless child.
- Have a plan for children who wake up before naptime is over and for those older children who have stopped napping every day. For example, children who wake up early can be given some books to look at or toys to play with quietly on their cot. A child who does not sleep at all should be allowed a quiet activity, in another room if possible.
- Supervise naptime. A teacher should be with the children at all times.
- Let children wake up at their own pace, without the expectation that they will wake up quickly or cheerfully from a deep sleep.
- Talk with parents about each child's sleeping habits and routines at home. If there are nap-related problems at school, often parents can provide the insight that will resolve the problem.

As this section has indicated, attention to planning and the details of the daily schedule and routines is time well spent. When the structure of the day is suited to the developmental and individual needs of the children, the daily program goes more smoothly and both teachers and children are prepared for the sequence of events.

The next section looks at the role of parents in the *Creative Curriculum* and discusses the necessity and value of cooperation between teachers and parents in encouraging children's development.

VI. The Parent's Role in the Creative Curriculum

Parents are the most important people in the child's world; they are also their child's first and primary teachers. Research confirms that the most effective early childhood programs are those which involve parents in meaningful ways. In the *Creative Curriculum*, assisting children's learning is viewed as a joint effort of both teachers and parents.

Setting the Stage for a Partnership

Although a teacher's primary job and interest is to work with young children, the needs of the child cannot be met unless the parents are also involved. Teachers who accept this premise are able to create the climate for a working partnership that will benefit all involved, especially the children. This partnership helps to ensure that the program will meet the needs of each child and that learning and growth will be supported at home.

An effective partnership begins with mutual respect and trust. Each party brings something important to the relationship. Teachers bring a knowledge of child development and early childhood education. They observe how each child interacts with peers, adults, and the environment. Teachers are able to assess a child's development in relation to other children at the same stage. As early childhood professionals, teachers have values and beliefs that underlie the program they plan and implement. All this information can be shared with parents. In turn, parents bring specialized knowledge and experiences to the partnership. They have a wealth of information about their child. They have dreams and expectations that must be considered and respected. Teachers have an obligation to respond to parents' expectations and to help them understand and appreciate how a developmentally appropriate curriculum will offer the best opportunity for their children's success now and in the future.

Listed below are some ways in which teachers can set a positive tone for a partnership with parents.

- Convey how central parents are to the *Creative Curriculum*. Let parents know that there are many ways they can be involved in their children's learning.
- Establish channels of communication at the beginning. Convey policies and procedures for program operation clearly and directly.
- Invite new parents to visit the program and talk about their observations. This is a good time to explain the program's philosophy and goals.
- Hold an Open House. Conduct a tour of the classroom. Explain the program and approach and invite questions.

- Solicit parents' expectations and concerns. Find out how they feel about their child entering the program. Note what parents have to say and respond.

- Get to know the parents. Learn their last names (sometimes different from each other's or the child's). Find out about their interests, other family members, their work. This information enables teachers to relate to parents more personally.

- Try out suggestions parents may have. When parents feel that their ideas are taken seriously, they are more likely to increase their involvement.

- Seek ways to help parents experience a sense of pride in their child. Noting something a child has done well and conveying this to the parent goes a long way in building a positive partnership.

- Always maintain confidentiality. What parents say about their child or their family should be used only to help teachers work with that child.

Setting the stage for a partnership is the first step in ensuring parent involvement in the curriculum. To nurture this partnership, ongoing communication is essential.

Ongoing Communication with Parents

When young children observe positive and genuine communication between their parents and teachers, they feel that their two worlds are connected. Both formal and informal communication have a place in an early childhood program. Formal communication is needed when everyone must receive the same message and when accuracy is required. For example, if policies change, a special event is planned, or a contagious disease has been diagnosed in one of the children or teachers in the class, written notices should be sent to parents.

Some suggestions for formal communication follow.

- Set up a parent's bulletin board or message center at the entrance to the classroom. Highlighting important notices will catch parents' attention. Articles of interest can be posted as well as a calendar of events, reminders of upcoming meetings, the week's menus, and so on.

- Send weekly messages home. A consistent format for weekly messages makes it easy for parents to locate important information. Appendix A to the *Creative Curriculum* contains sample letters that can be used as models by teachers to communicate with parents about extending children's learning in each of the interest areas.)

- Establish a message center where each family has a box or message pocket. This can be used for general announcements as well as information pertaining to each child.

- Provide each family with a journal that can be used by both parents or teachers to share information about the child. The journal can go to and from school in the child's backpack, and flyers or notices can be tucked inside.

- Develop and keep current a parent handbook. It might include an explanation of the program's philosophy, goals, and approach as well as policies and procedures.

Informal communication with parents is an everyday activity. It occurs naturally when children are brought to the program and/or picked up by their parents. Although most of these communications are casual, some planning can ensure that teachers make the most of these times. Noting something a child has done during the day and jotting it down so that it can be shared with parents at the end of the day is one way to make these brief encounters more meaningful.

Some suggestions for ongoing informal communication follow.

- Always greet parents by name. Have something specific to say to each one. Make parents feel as welcome as their children. "Good morning, Mrs. Lewis. I hear that your family is going on a trip."

- Share an event or something the child has done recently. "You should have seen the building Marie made with blocks yesterday!"

- Solicit parents' advice about their child. "We haven't been very successful at getting Lisa to paint. Do you have any suggestions?"

- Give support to parents when needed. "It's hard for Michael to say goodbye to you today. Perhaps he needs some extra reassurance from you."

- Be a good listener. Using active listening skills conveys to parents that their concerns and ideas are being taken seriously. "I can understand how upset you were when Andrea told you about the biting incident. I can assure you that we are dealing with the situation. I'll be certain to reassure Andrea."

- Check out what parents have said if there is any uncertainty. "Let me see if I understood correctly. What I heard you say is...."

- Use "I messages" to communicate clearly without judging or putting parents on the defensive. "Carrie likes to play with clay but she worries about her clothes getting dirty. I want to be sure she really enjoys herself here. I thought maybe if she wore clothes that were more easily washable, neither one of us would worry and Carrie would have more fun."

Taking time to communicate regularly with parents greatly enhances the chances for active parent involvement in the program. However, if opportunities for this type of interaction do not exist because, for example, children are bussed to the program, teachers can converse with parents by telephone and schedule periodic conferences.

Involving Parents in the Daily Program

One of the best ways for parents to understand, extend, and enrich the curriculum is for them to participate in the daily program as a volunteer or special guest. By participating, parents can see for themselves how teachers interact with children to promote learning and growth. They can gain firsthand knowledge about the curriculum and how it is implemented.

When parents participate in the preschool program, children benefit in many ways. First, more adults in the room mean more individual attention for children. In addition, parents who bring a special interest or skill into the classroom enrich the curriculum. Finally, children who see their parents playing a new role find this exciting and a source of pride.

A little planning and forethought go a long way toward ensuring that parent involvement in the daily program is successful. Some suggestions for involving parents follow.

- Suggest a variety of ways in which parents can contribute, such as reading a story to a small group, helping on a field trip, leading a food preparation activity, or sharing a special interest or experience.
- Conduct an orientation for parents who wish to work in the room. Talk about the daily schedule and routines to prepare them for the flow of the day's activities and the procedures that children follow.
- Suggest that parents spend a few hours just observing the program, and talk to them afterward about their observations and questions.
- Post cards in each interest area explaining what children learn and giving tips for working and talking with children in the area.
- Have a follow-up conversation with each parent who participates in the program. Talk to parents about their experience and thank them for their assistance.

Experienced teachers know that not all parents can or want to be involved in the daily program. Individual preferences as well as schedules need to be respected. Teachers should look for other ways to involve those parents who do not opt to participate in the daily program. Some parents may be able to get away for an occasional meal with their child. Others may volunteer to help with a project on a weekend or evening. Parents can also assist at home by typing up a story, sewing doll clothes, or collecting "beautiful junk." There are many ways in which parents can be involved in the *Creative Curriculum*.

Parent Conferences as a Way to Individualize the Program

While much valuable information can be shared in daily, informal communication, parent conferences provide time for a more in-depth exchange of ideas and for problem solving when needed. Conferences are an excellent time for teachers to ask parents to share information that will help them meet individual needs. Conferences also provide a good opportunity to help parents better understand the program's goals and objectives and how their child is progressing in the program. Better understanding builds a stronger partnership and promotes the likelihood of follow-through at home.

Preparing for a Conference

In scheduling a parent conference, teachers should give parents an idea of what to expect. A brief explanation of the purpose of the conference, its anticipated length, and what will be discussed helps parents prepare themselves. Parental input should also be sought, since parents frequently have specific questions and concerns they want addressed.

If possible, parents should be offered several options for scheduling a conference. Some parents may be available only at lunch or in the evening. Additionally, when parents are separated or have joint custody, teachers will need to be sensitive about whether one conference or two will be needed.

In preparing for the conference, it is essential to consult the child's file. This will allow the teacher to accurately address questions regarding the child's progress. Anecdotal records included in the file are especially useful in giving parents a flavor for how their child relates to both the environment and others.

Conducting the Conference

Almost all parents have difficulty being objective about their children. Knowing this can help teachers think through how best to approach the conference. Listed below are some strategies that can help teachers to create a comfortable atmosphere.

- Establish a relaxed tone at the beginning. Take a few minutes for social conversation at the start.

- Explain how the conference will proceed and exactly what time is available. Clear expectations are important to a successful parent conference.

- Ask parents for their perceptions before you present yours. "What does Kelly say about the program? Have you seen any changes in her?"

- Be descriptive rather than labeling or judging a child's behavior. Don't say "Steven is shy. He's very dependent on the teacher." Describe what Steven does: "Steven tends to watch the other children a lot. He often needs our help to enter a group. But once he does, he is able to play quite well."

- Focus on expanding the child's strengths rather than eliminating weaknesses. "Tony is very good at completing difficult puzzles and pegboards. We plan a lot of activities in which he can build on his eye-hand coordination skills."

- Organize comments about the child, sharing with parents such information as the following:

  interest areas that their child plays in most;

  how their child reacts to group activities (stories, music, circle time);

  routines and self-help skills;

  special interests and friends; and

  development in all areas--socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical.

- Use the questions and concerns parents raise to help them learn more about the curriculum. Clarify the parents' questions or concerns first. "When you say you want Bradley to learn his alphabet here, am I right in assuming you mean you want us to do everything we can to be sure he is successful here and later on?" "Our most important goal is to help children develop and grow in ways that will ensure success now and when they go to school. Let me tell you how we do this."

When parents sense that teachers respect their concerns and want to do everything possible to ensure their child's success, they are more open to sharing their viewpoints and supporting common goals. A positive relationship with parents is also a constructive foundation for dealing with problems when they arise.

Problem-Solving Conferences

A problem may be identified by a teacher or a parent. Regardless of who requests the conference, it is important for teachers to prepare ahead of time by gathering as much information as possible and thinking through possible strategies for dealing with the problem. The following sequence may be helpful in conducting a problem-solving session with parents.

- Make sure that there is agreement on what the problem is by being as descriptive as possible. "Elias bites other children, sometimes several times a day."

- Bring observations of the child that will help identify when the behavior occurs, what seems to provoke it, and what the child does afterward. "Elias bit Michael when he wanted to play with the red truck and Michael hid it." "Elias had been watching Evan and

David building in the block corner. He sat down next to them and when David told him to go away, Elias bit David."

- Ask parents for their observations. "Does Elias ever bite at home? When does it occur?"

- Discuss what might be causing the problem behavior. "It looks as if Elias wants to communicate with other children, but doesn't know how--so he bites."

- Agree on goals for the child--for example,

  to stop biting,

  to learn to use words to say what he wants,

  to feel better about himself, and

  to play with one or two other children successfully.

- Discuss strategies for achieving goals. "This is what we can do here to help Elias stop biting and relate more successfully to other children. What have you tried at home?"

Problem-solving sessions are not always easy to manage. They are, however, more likely to succeed when teachers are prepared, ready to listen, and able to maintain a non-judgmental attitude.

Sharing the Creative Curriculum with Parents

This section has examined ways in which a partnership can be established between parents and teachers. This partnership is essential if parents are to understand the *Creative Curriculum*. When parents trust the judgment and expertise of their children's teachers, they are more open to accepting the teachers' selection of a curriculum.

No one would argue with the statement that all parents want their children to succeed. For many parents, though, success is measured by how quickly the child learns and how early the child accomplishes tasks that parents judge as important. For example, learning the alphabet, knowing how to count, and being able to read are concrete accomplishments that many parents readily understand. Early childhood teachers have an obligation to listen to parents' wishes and to help them see how a developmentally appropriate curriculum such as the *Creative Curriculum* will best serve the child now and in the future.

To help parents understand the approach to learning in a developmentally appropriate curriculum, teachers can use a number of strategies. One of the most effective techniques is to share with parents the advice of experts in the field of early childhood education. As supporting references, teachers might wish to collect articles in newspapers, journals, and magazines. For example, the article "When Parental Caring is Damaging," by Darrell Sifford, which appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on June 12, 1986, describes the type of research on which the *Creative Curriculum* is based. Sifford quotes T. Berry Brazelton, professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, on the subject of pushing children to achieve intellectual growth:

> Children can learn early. They can do it, but they do it for the parents, not for themselves. They get positive feedback, and they thrive. In first grade, they're way ahead of the class...but by second grade, they don't stand out as much. Some of the other kids are catching up and they're no longer the center of attention. By third grade, they're floundering.

The reason these children have lost their edge and are floundering, according to Brazelton, is that they have learned "in ways that don't help them to learn later."

Short articles like this one, which quotes leading experts, can be shared with parents and used as a starting point for explaining how the *Creative Curriculum* promotes learning and growth in ways that help children continue wanting to learn throughout later schooling and life.

Each of the modules in the *Creative Curriculum* contains a section on the parent's role in extending learning. Included are suggestions for conducting workshops for parents on how children learn in each interest area. Teachers may wish to combine these workshops into an orientation session that covers all areas of the curriculum or to hold separate workshops on each topic.

Other strategies for helping parents understand the importance of a developmentally appropriate curriculum include the following:

- Share the National Association for the Education of Young Children's publication, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, with parents. The chart that compares appropriate and inappropriate practice is especially persuasive.

- Invite experts to speak at a parent meeting or workshop.

- Show parents the videotape on the *Creative Curriculum*, which illustrates the curriculum in action.

- Develop a brochure on the program that briefly explains the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the program.

The remaining modules of the *Creative Curriculum* focus on each of the interest areas in which the program is implemented. Each module addresses what and how children learn, how the environment is arranged, the role of the teacher, and the parents' role in the *Creative Curriculum*. Reading lists are provided at the end of each module for those who wish to know more about the issues explored. Taken together, these modules support teachers in providing the kind of environment and interactions that enable children to grow and develop in all areas.

VII. For Further Reading

Beaty, Janice J. *Observing Development of the Young Child.* Columbus, OH: Bell and Howell Co., 1986.

Bredekamp, Sue (ed.). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987.

Cohen, Dorothy, and Virginia Stern. *Observing and Recording the Behavior of Young Children.* New York: Teachers College Press (Columbia University), 1970.

Feeney, Stephanie, Doris Christensen, and Eva Moravcik. *Who Am I in the Lives of Children? An Introduction to Teaching Young Children* (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1987.

Fraiberg, Selma H. *The Magic Years.* New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1959.

Hymes, James. *The Child Under Six.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Leeper, Sarah, D. Skipper, and R. Witherspoon. *Good Schools for Young Children* (5th ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1984.

Longstreth, Langdon E. *Psychological Development of the Child.* New York: Ronald Press, 1968.

Moyer, Joan (ed.). *Selecting Educational Equipment and Materials for School and Home.* Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1987.

Read, Katherine. *Early Childhood Programs: Human Relationships and Learning* (8th ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987.

Seefeldt, Carol, and Nita Barbouer. *Early Childhood Education: An Introduction.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1986.

Souweine, Judith, Sheila Crimmins, and Carolyn Mazel. *Mainstreaming Ideas for Teaching Young Children.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1981.

Blocks

I. Introduction to Blocks: Philosophy and Theory 61

- What Are Blocks and Why Are They Important? 61
- Developmental Stages of Block Play 61

II. Children at Play with Blocks: Goals and Objectives 68

- Goals for Children in the Block Corner 68
- Learning Objectives for Children in the Block Corner 69

III. Setting Up the Block Corner: The Physical Environment 71

- Selecting Blocks 71
- Setting Up the Area for Unit Blocks 76
- Selecting Props and Accessories for Block Play 82
- Caring for Blocks 87
- Ensuring Children's Safety in the Block Corner 88

IV. Interacting with Children in the Block Corner: The Teacher's Role 89

- Observing Children in the Block Corner 89
- Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Block Play 90
- Extending and Enriching Children's Play in the Block Corner 93
- Facilitating the Development of Specific Learning Skills 96
- Strategies for Teachers in the Block Corner 105

V. Supporting Children's Block Play: The Parent's Role 109

- Helping Parents Appreciate the Value of Blocks 109
- Encouraging Block Play at Home 110

VI. For Further Reading on Blocks 113

I. Introduction to Blocks: Philosophy and Theory

What Are Blocks and Why Are They Important?

Blocks are such a rich source of learning that they are considered essential to the *Creative Curriculum.* There are many types of blocks--hard wooden unit blocks, large hollow blocks, cardboard blocks, and a variety of blocks that are considered table toys, such as Legos and attribute blocks. Although each type offers a variety of learning and growth opportunities, the major focus of this section is on unit blocks.

Almost all aspects of a child's development can be enhanced through the use of blocks. Because blocks are designed in mathematical units, children playing with them develop a concrete understanding of concepts essential to logical thinking. They learn about sizes, shapes, numbers, order, area, length, and weight as they select, build, and clean up blocks. Physical development of both large and small muscles is enhanced through the use of blocks. Language, aesthestic, and social development take place in the block corner. As children build together, they solve problems and learn to cooperate with and respect the work of others.

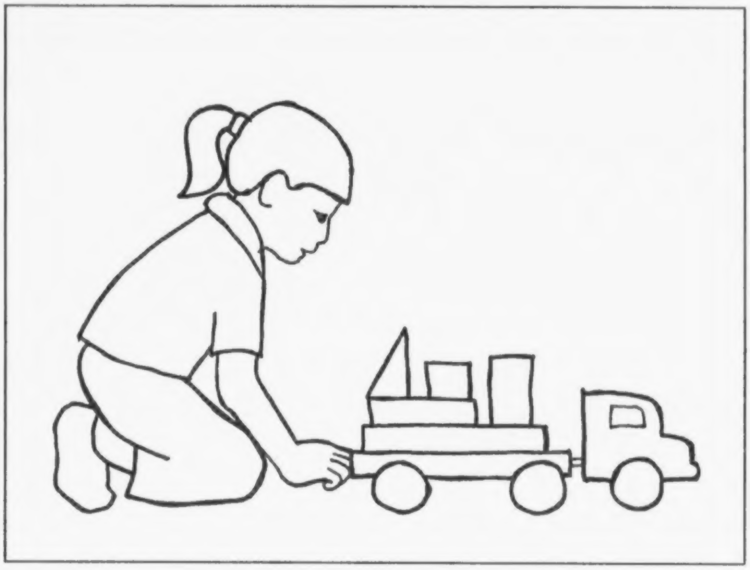
Developmental Stages of Block Play

As with all areas of development, children go through stages in using blocks, and they progress through these stages at different rates. Yet for all children there is a developmental progression in block play. It is important that teachers understand this progression so that block play can be viewed as an ongoing opportunity for learning and growth, and so that teachers can be comfortable in their expectations of what children should be accomplishing in block play. For example, it is just as appropriate for a child first using blocks to just carry those blocks around as it is for an experienced five-year-old block builder to construct an intricate tower. Each child is exhibiting behaviors appropriate to his or her current stage of development.

There are four stages in block use, each of which is briefly summarized below.

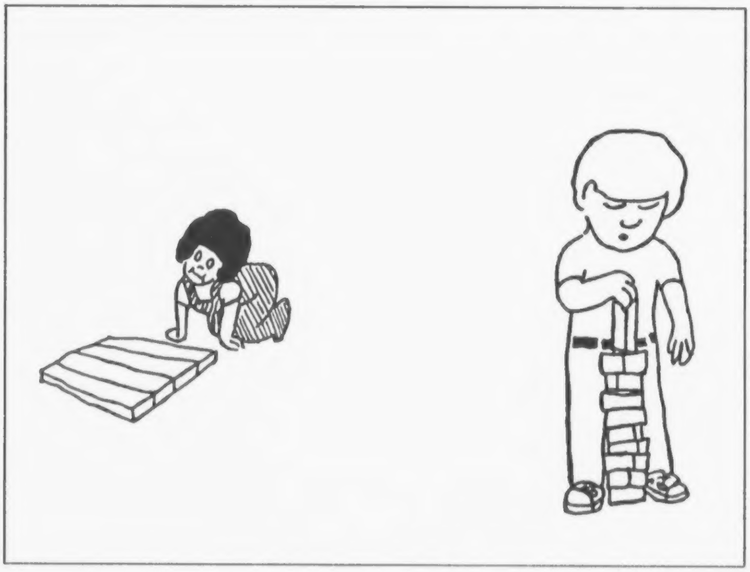
Stage I: Carrying Blocks

Young children, new to blocks, carry them around or pile them in a truck and push them. At this point, children are just starting to learn about blocks--how heavy they are, what they feel like, and how many can be carried at once. By experimenting with blocks, children begin to learn their properties and to gain an understanding of what they can and cannot do with blocks.



Stage II: Piling Blocks and Laying Blocks on the Floor

Once children feel comfortable with blocks, building begins. At this stage children are likely to stack blocks in piles or lay them flat on the floor.

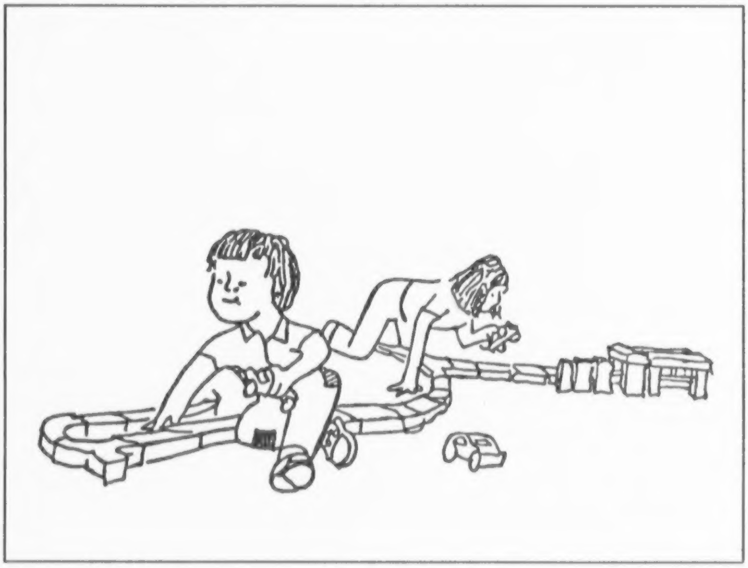


Children in Stage II are still learning about the characteristics of blocks, such as how putting one on top of another makes a tower or what different arrangements look like as they lie on the floor. By trying out various sizes and shapes, children can experience firsthand the differences and similarities among blocks.

At this stage children also begin to apply imagination and critical thinking skills to their block play. Flat rows of blocks on the floor typically suggest a road to young builders. Props of cars and trucks are creatively used by children at this stage to represent traffic moving along roads.

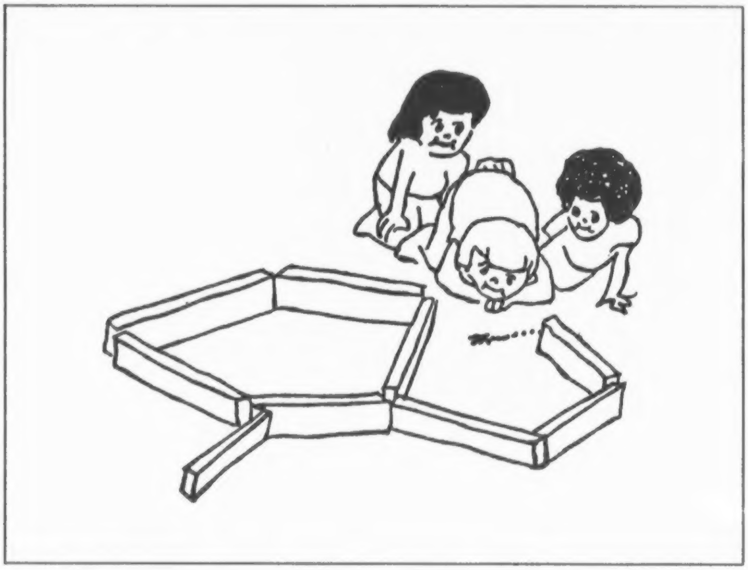
Stage III: Connecting Blocks to Create Structures

The use of roads during Stage II marks the transition from piling blocks to making actual constructions. Children who have become comfortable with road building find that they can use roads to link towers. This discovery in turn leads to an active stage of experimentation as children apply their problem-solving skills to block building.

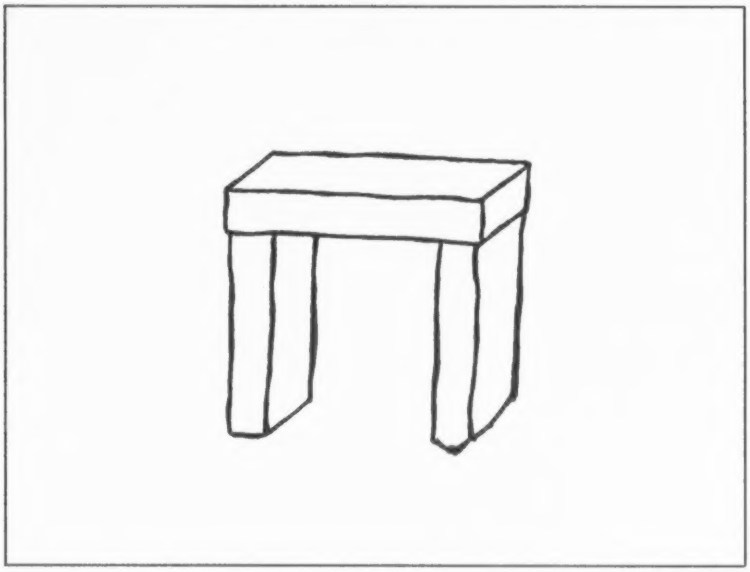


Typically, children in Stage III are three- or four-year-olds and have had some experience with blocks. This experience enables these children to approach blocks in new, creative ways. Typical among the construction techniques developed by children in Stage III are these:

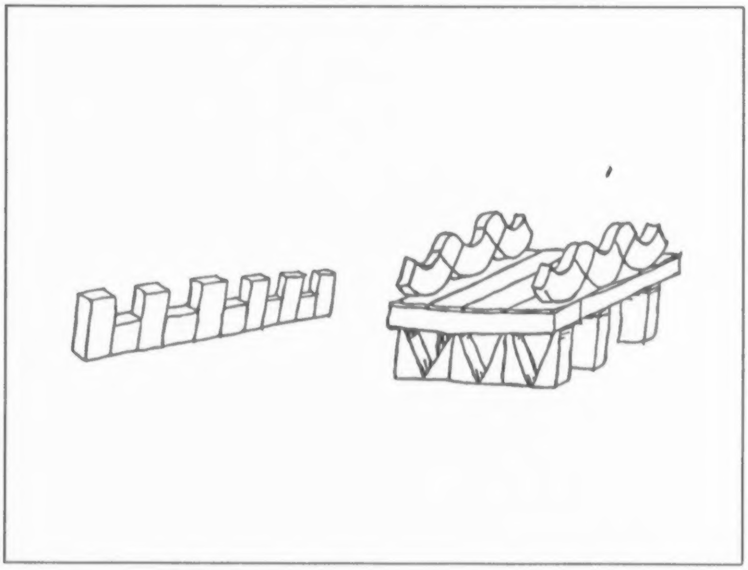
- **Making enclosures.** Children put blocks together to enclose a space. At first, children are usually interested in enclosing as a new block-building technique. Making the enclosure is a satisfying experience in and of itself. Later, the enclosure may be used for dramatic play with zoo or farm animals. Enclosures also lead children to many mathematical discoveries involving area and geometry.



- **Bridging.** Children set up two blocks, leave a space between them, and connect the two blocks with another block. As with enclosures, children use bridges first as a construction technique and later as a mechanism for dramatic play enhancement. Bridging also teaches children balance and improves eye-hand coordination.



- **Designing.** Children form decorative patterns and symmetrical layouts. Children are often fascinated with symmetry, balance, and patterns. Once they have combined a few blocks in a certain way, they may continue the same pattern until their supply of blocks runs out. At the same time that they are expressing themselves aesthetically, children who design block patterns learn to see likenesses and differences and develop motor skills.

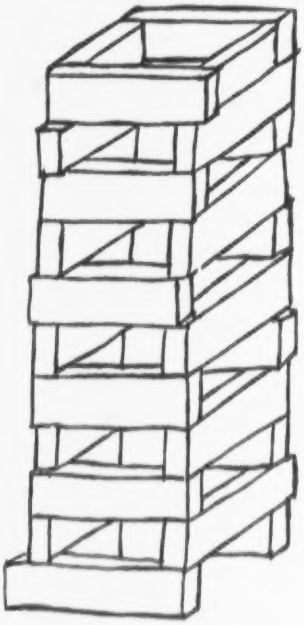


77

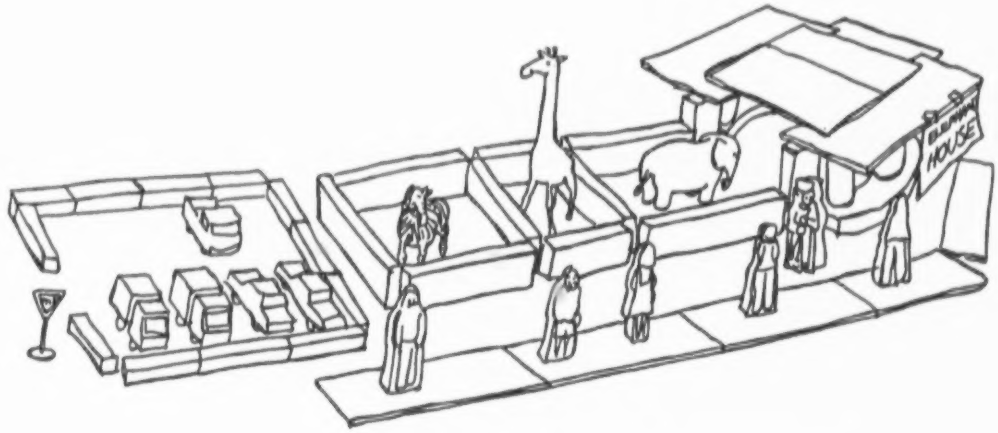
Stage IV: Making Elaborate Constructions

With building experience, four- to six-year-olds, are able to put blocks together with dexterity and skill. Children learn to adapt to changes in their building area by curving structures and by building them above, around, or over obstacles. Children in Stage IV are adept in creating structures of remarkable complexity and ingenuity.

During this stage of development, children need a variety of block sizes and shapes so that they can add variety and interest to their constructions. Another hallmark of Stage IV is that children are able to label their constructions. These labeled structures are often used as the setting for dramatic play.



Apartment House



This is My Zoo

These four stages represent the child's developmental progression with block play. The remainder of this module outlines how teachers can use this theoretical knowledge to facilitate children's physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive growth through the use of blocks. The next section presents goals and objectives for children through block play.

II. Children at Play with Blocks: Goals and Objectives

Goals for Children in the Block Corner

As discussed in Section I, block play provides numerous opportunities for children to develop cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical skills. The following main goals for children to achieve through block play are highlighted in the *Creative Curriculum.*

Cognitive Development

- To develop problem-solving skills.
- To enhance creativity.
- To acquire an understanding of scientific and physical concepts such as gravity, inclined planes, and balance.
- To learn basic math and reading readiness skills.
- To persevere at tasks.

Socio-Emotional Development

- To act independently and make choices.
- To express feelings in socially acceptable ways.
- To cooperate as members of a group.
- To respect materials.
- To experience pride in accomplishments.

Physical Development

- To develop muscular control and coordination.
- To develop eye-hand coordination.
- To develop visual perception.

Learning Objectives for Children in the Block Corner

For each of these goal areas, teachers can identify specific learning objectives. Although teachers will, of course, want to specify objectives that are based on the individual needs and interests of the children in their classrooms, the *Creative Curriculum* offers the following list of objectives as a starting point.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To identify different shapes, sizes, and geometrical relationships.
- To develop an understanding of concepts of length, height, weight, and area.
- To classify and sort objects by size, shape, and function.
- To make use of physical principles such as weight, stability, equilibrium, balance, and leverage.
- To experiment with new ways of achieving construction goals.
- To predict cause-and-effect relationships.
- To solve problems related to construction, such as bridging or making steps.
- To use critical thinking skills to adapt to new situations; that is, to generalize known solutions to new problems.
- To count in sequential order.
- To use beginning principles of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and fractions.
- To demonstrate reading readiness skills on the basis of visual and spatial discrimination.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To work independently and in a group by deciding when, how, and with whom to play.
- To express needs, concerns, and fears in socially acceptable ways, such as through dramatic play.
- To share and cooperate with others by trading materials and props and planning joint building ventures.

- To demonstrate pride in accomplishments and a positive self-image through successes in the block corner.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To use large and small muscle skills, such as grasping, lifting, and placing, through experience in building and balancing blocks.
- To develop eye-hand coordination by placing blocks in desired patterns.
- To control the placement of objects--under, over, above, below, on top of, and next to--when constructing with blocks.

Working together with children, teachers can actualize these goals and objectives in their classrooms. The next section explains how the physical arrangement of the block area can support teachers' goals for children's learning.

III. Setting Up the Block Corner: The Physical Environment

As we have seen, how the classroom is set up and the types of materials available to children have much to do with how children behave and what they learn. The type and amount of blocks, as well as the type of area dedicated to block play, send messages to children about the importance and value of blocks in the preschool curriculum.

Selecting Blocks

Blocks come in a wide range of shapes, sizes, and materials. The various types of blocks are described below.

Unit Blocks

In order for the *Creative Curriculum* to be successfully implemented, it is essential that every classroom have its own set of hardwood unit blocks. Hardwood blocks are recommended because they are durable, have no rough edges, and are easy for children to manipulate. Unit blocks are recommended because they come in proportional sizes that allow children to learn math concepts as they become involved in building. Unit blocks come in as many as 25 sizes and shapes, as indicated by the illustration on the next page. The basic unit block is 5-1/2" x 2-3/4" x 1-3/8". All blocks in the set are proportional in length or width to this basic unit. For example, the double-unit block is 11" long and the half-unit is 2-3/4" long. In addition, the two half-triangles equal one unit and the four quarter-circles equal one circle.

In many programs teachers do not have the final authority to order equipment and materials; they are, however, usually consulted by the education coordinator or director. A set of 100 unit blocks for a classroom of 10 to 15 children is recommended in the *Creative Curriculum*. This total should include as wide a range of sizes and shapes as possible, including ramps, curves, and cylinders. The more types of blocks children have access to, the more likely their creativity will be developed.

Depending on the age and experience levels of the children in the classroom, not all of the 100 blocks need to be made available to children at once. For young children or inexperienced block builders, it is probably preferable to introduce just a few basic shapes and sizes at the start of the school year, such as the unit, half-unit, and double-unit blocks. As children become more comfortable and adept at building and putting blocks away, teachers can add additional blocks. For four- and five-year-olds, it is usually not necessary to limit the number of blocks at the start of the year, as older children are not likely to be overwhelmed by a complete set of blocks. However, if a teacher observes an individual child who appears reluctant or uncertain about what to do with blocks, it would be helpful for the teacher to introduce that child to the block area slowly, a few shapes at a time.

UNIT BLOCKS

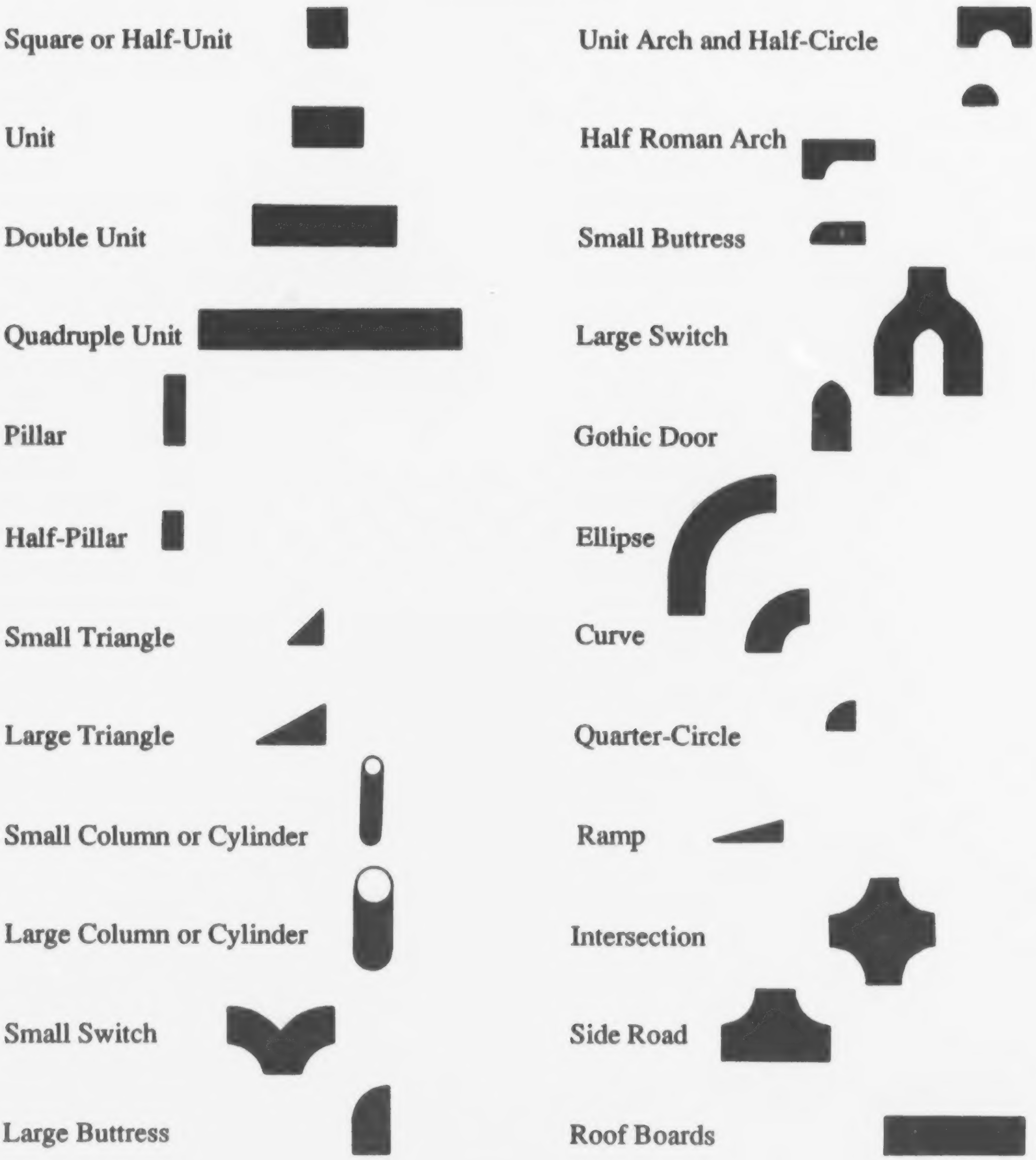
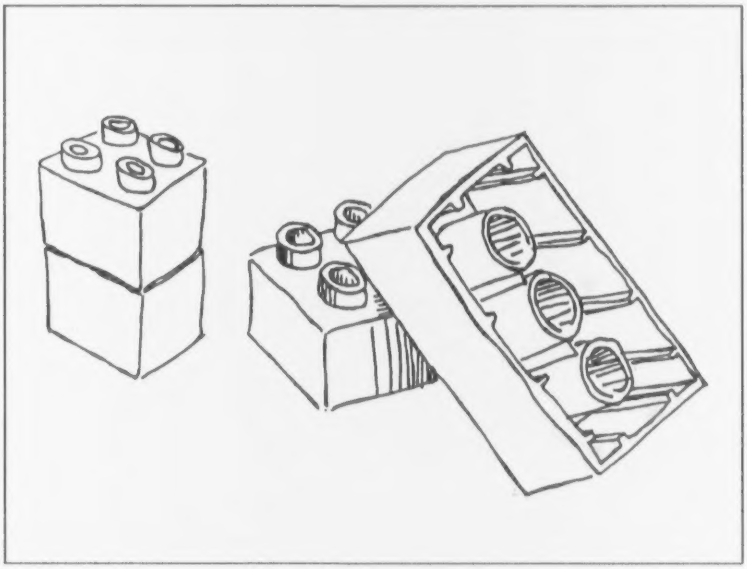

Square or Half-Unit
Unit
Double Unit
Quadruple Unit
Pillar
Half-Pillar
Small Triangle
Large Triangle
Small Column or Cylinder
Large Column or Cylinder
Small Switch
Large Buttress
Unit Arch and Half-Circle
Half Roman Arch
Small Buttress
Large Switch
Gothic Door
Ellipse
Curve
Quarter-Circle
Ramp
Intersection
Side Road
Roof Boards

Table Blocks and Legos

The most typical kinds of table blocks (some scaled to size as unit blocks, others not) are small sets of blocks, Legos, attribute blocks, cube blocks, Cuisenaire Rods, and an assortment of "put-together" blocks such as Lincoln Logs. (A more extensive discussion of table blocks can be found in the Table Toys module of the *Creative Curriculum.*)

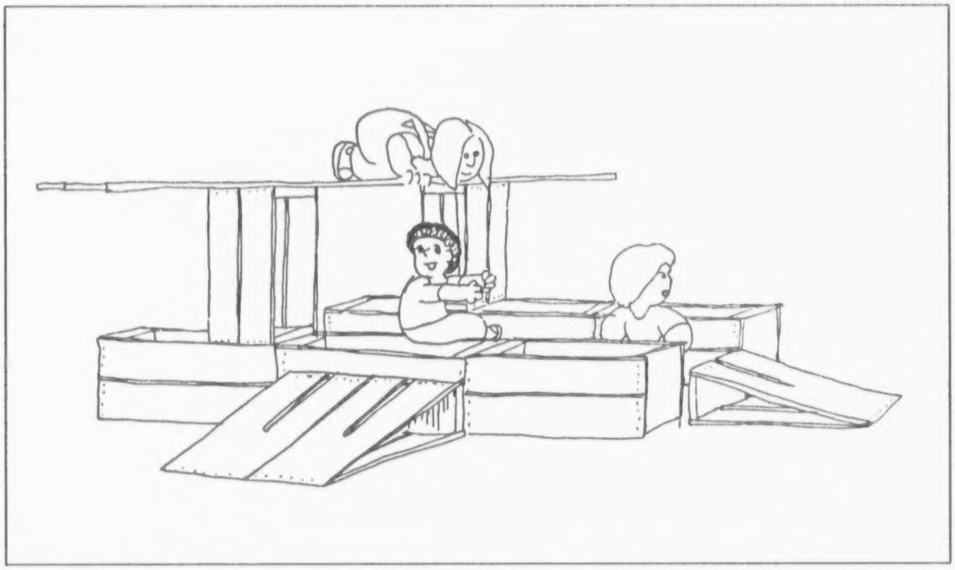
Children go through the same stages in working with table blocks as they do with unit blocks. Sometimes a child who does not choose to go to the block corner will play with the smaller table blocks. Table blocks are especially appealing to the child who is reluctant to get down on the floor but who desires to work in a more confined space. Because young children do enjoy these small blocks, they are a good material to introduce early in the year. The smaller blocks are also useful for developing fine motor skills.



Hollow Blocks

Hollow blocks are made of wood and are much larger in size than unit blocks. The basic square is 5-1/2" x 11" x 11". There are five other pieces in a set: a half-square, a double square, two lengths of flat board, and a ramp.

Hollow blocks are open on the sides so that they can be carried easily by all but very young children. Because children typically enjoy carrying hollow blocks around the block area, these blocks are excellent for children's large muscle development. Young children also enjoy the sense of power they gain by moving something large.



Hollow blocks stimulate quite a different type of block activity than hard unit blocks and table blocks. Because of their size, hollow blocks lend themselves primarily to dramatic play. With them, children can construct large creations--a boat, an airplane, a rocket--and then climb inside to pretend to be the sea captain, pilot, or astronaut.

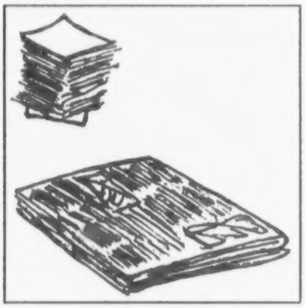
Homemade Blocks

In addition to hardwood unit blocks, table blocks and Legos, and hollow blocks, teachers may wish to supplement block play with homemade blocks, such as those made from milk cartons. These blocks are important additions to the classroom, as they are practically cost-free to construct and quite effective to use.

Milk cartons are a particularly choice material for block construction because they come in proportional sizes: half-pints, pints, quarts, half-gallons, and gallons. Making blocks from milk cartons requires the following:

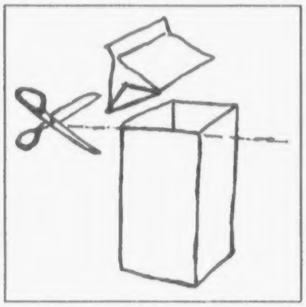
- cardboard milk cartons (two for each block);
- newspaper;
- rubber bands; and
- contact paper to cover (optional).

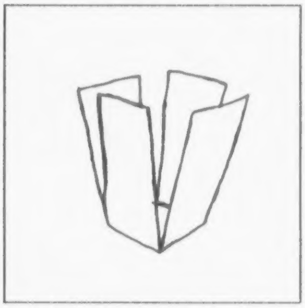
The following steps are involved in constructing homemade milk carton blocks:



1. Cut out newspaper squares the size of the bottom of a carton. A paper cutter makes this task easier.

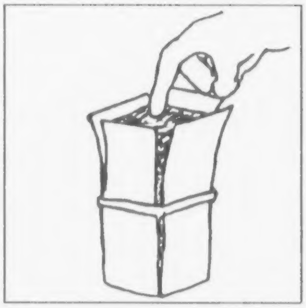
2. Cut the tops off the cartons so they have a square opening that is just like the bottom of the carton.

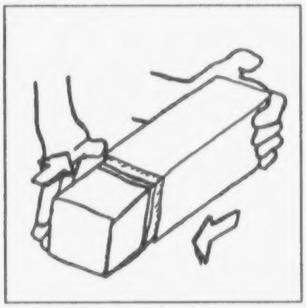




3. Slit *one* of the two cartons down each corner. Hold it back together with three rubber bands.

4. Pack the slit carton with newspaper squares stacked flat and pressed down. This fills the carton and allows it to stand up and to weight the second carton, which encloses it (step 5).





5. When the first carton is filled, put the second carton over the first upside down. The rubber bands can be removed, as the second carton encloses the first. Finish the block by covering it with contact paper (if desired).

Setting Up the Area for Unit Blocks

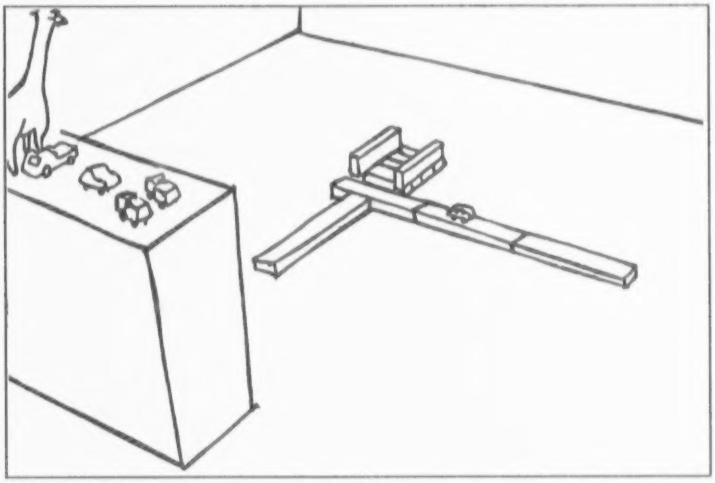
The size and location of the block corner are critical to its success. It makes no difference how full a selection of blocks is available to children if the space in which they are to play with these blocks is insufficient or plagued with problems. To maximize the potential of blocks as effective learning materials, teachers should give children a clearly defined space for block play that makes block building an inviting activity. In selecting an area for block play, the following three factors should be considered.

1. The block corner should be enclosed on at least three sides.

As noted, block play requires a clearly defined area. When the area is enclosed on three sides, there are fewer accidents and less likelihood that constructions will be toppled. This leaves children free from worry that someone will interrupt their play or destroy their work. Children are also less likely to take blocks into other interest areas when they have a clearly defined space for block play.

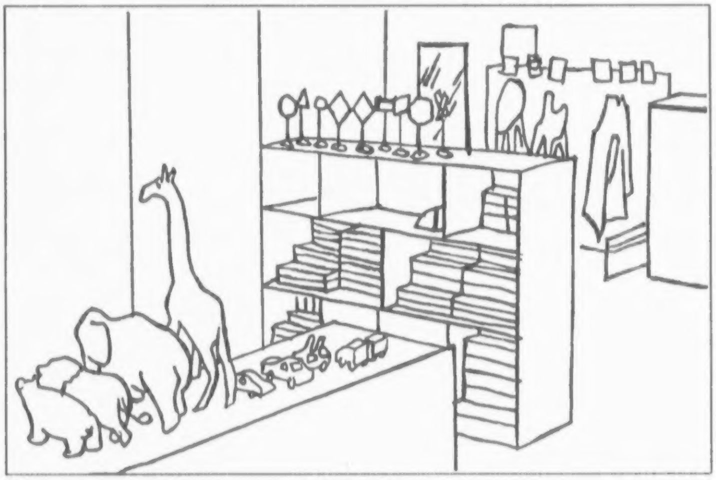
An enclosed block area also gives children a feeling of security. A classroom with clearly defined, individual play areas is more comfortable and inviting to children. This definition of the physical environment is especially important to the child who finds it difficult to stay at a task or who is easily distracted by what is happening in the rest of the classroom.

Locating the block area in a corner of the room offers the advantage of having two walls as dividers. Furniture or shelving can be used to create additional boundaries. Teachers can also effectively use tape to designate the boundaries of the block area. Walls, furniture, and tape all give children the message: "Here is where block building takes place."



2. The block corner should be set up in a part of the classroom that is already fairly noisy.

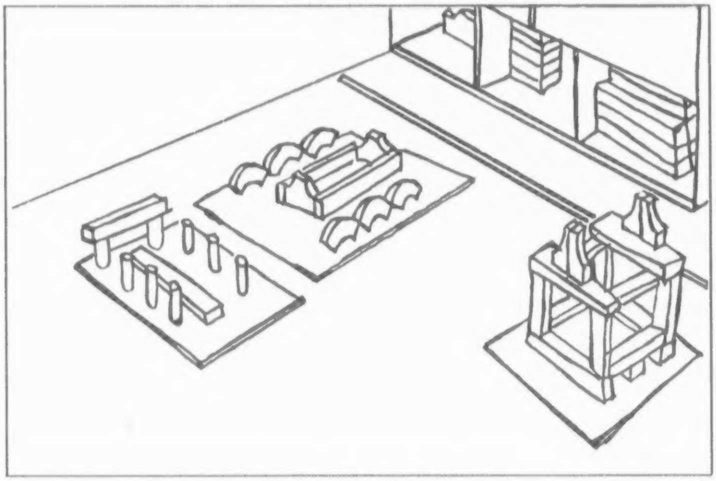
In designating a place for block play, it is best to choose an area that is adjacent to another active and noisy area so that children performing quiet activities will not be disturbed by loud block play. Situating the block corner next to the house corner, for example, is an excellent choice of arrangement. Not only do both areas engage children in active play, but they also share a common element of dramatic play that could be enhanced by the proximity of the two areas.



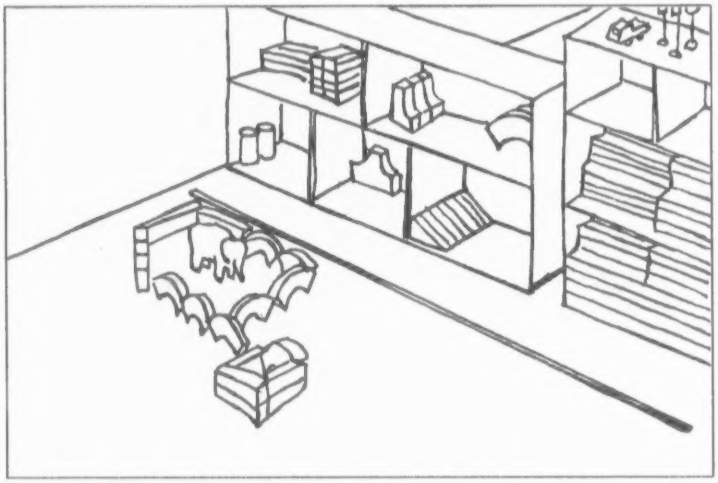
3. The block corner should be large enough for children to be able to spread out their blocks.

Block play requires a large play area. If the block corner is too small, children will have to build very close to each other. This not only leads to squabbles over "turf" but also inhibits children who like to create large or long structures. An area that is too small sends a message to children that block play is not very important in this classroom. Because children typically build with unit blocks on the floor, tables do not belong in the block corner.

Many children need to have individual spaces in the block corner. If several children are building at the same time, it is especially helpful to define individual areas. One way to do this is to use cardboard sheets. Thick cardboard makes a good, flat surface on which individual children can work. Moreover, cardboard sheets can correct problems caused by an uneven floor or loose carpeting.



Alternatively, tape can be used to define individual areas. Tape is also useful in defining "no building zones" in areas that are prone to toppling accidents.



Once an appropriate block corner has been designated, teachers need to consider additional design features that will maximize the effectiveness of the block area. These are discussed next.

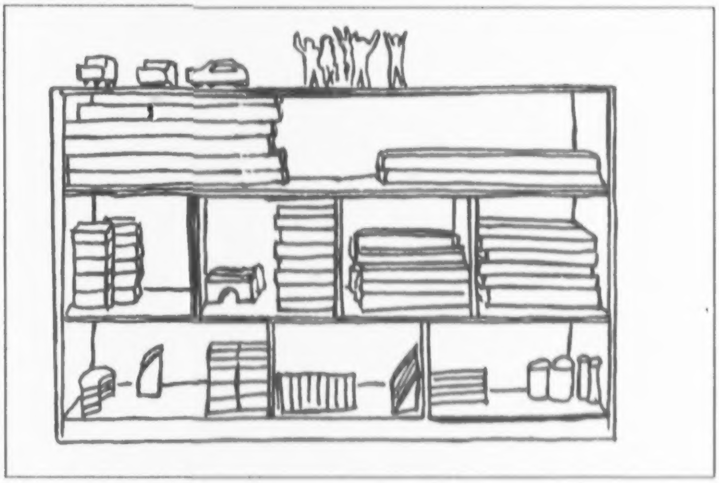
Floor Covering

Effective floor covering for block building serves several important functions. It cuts down on the noise level, it makes block play more comfortable for children and adults, and it reduces toppling accidents.

Indoor-outdoor carpeting makes an ideal floor covering because it is comfortable to sit on and makes it easy for blocks to stand up steadily. Thick-pile or shag rugs should be avoided because they increase the likelihood of toppling accidents. Linoleum, too, is not recommended because sitting on it soon becomes uncomfortable.

Block Display

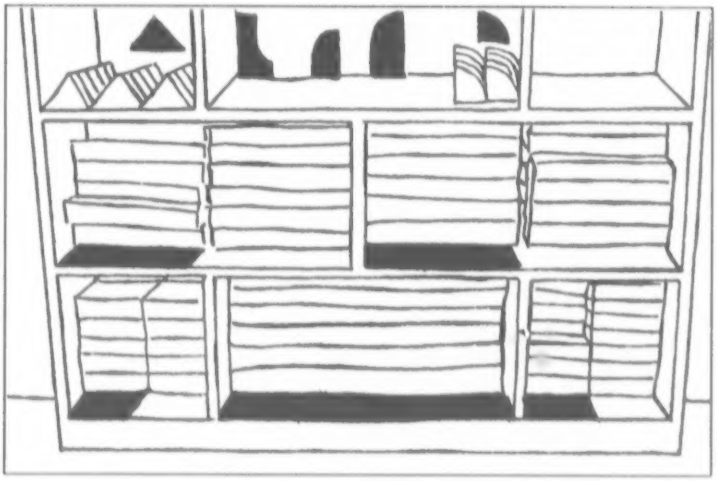
How blocks are displayed not only affects children's use of blocks but facilitates children's learning of sizes and shapes as well. Although it may seem easier to store blocks in a large cardboard box, the *Creative Curriculum* does not recommend this method. Not only does this set-up encourage children to take out every block in order to find the ones they need, but it also virtually guarantees that clean-up will be a free-for-all, with children randomly throwing blocks back into the box. Rather, blocks should be stored on shelves at the children's eye level. This arrangement enables children to see the shapes that are available and to pick out only those which are of interest to them.



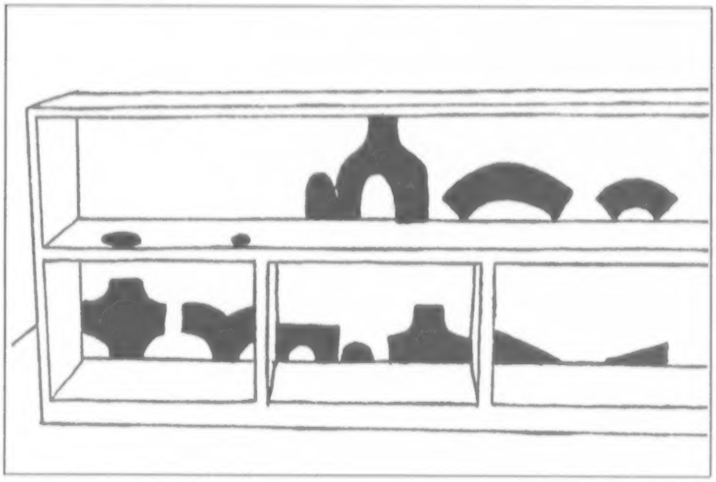
The blocks in the illustration above are neatly arranged on the shelf and grouped by size and shape. This gives a clear message to children that blocks are important. Moreover, because children can easily see the different shapes, they can purposefully and independently select the ones they need.

To further enhance the display and care of blocks, the *Creative Curriculum* endorses the idea of labeling block storage areas. Labeling the areas on the shelves where used blocks should be returned conveys to the children a sense of order and reinforces the importance of block play.

Labeling is done by tracing the outlines of the blocks onto solid-colored contact paper. (Blue or red are recommended colors because they are generally pleasing to children and will show up well on a shelf.) The outlined shapes are then cut out and placed on the shelves. Contact paper labels can easily be removed and replaced if the blocks are rearranged. For blocks that lie flat, the outline label would go in the left-hand corner of the shelf. This placement reinforces left-to-right directionality, an important reading skill.



For blocks that stand up, the outline would go behind the blocks on the back of the shelf.



Block labels should be grouped by both size and shape. All the labels for unit blocks should be placed on the shelf lengthwise so that children can see which block is which. (If placed endwise, the unit and double-unit blocks look the same.)

Teachers who use labeling also find that clean-up becomes a much easier task. With labeling, clean-up also becomes a learning experience as children practice their matching skills.

Setting Up Areas for Other Types of Blocks

The foregoing discussion is targeted to hardwood unit blocks. However, a few words should be added regarding other blocks that may be found in the classroom.

As their name implies, table blocks are typically used in the table toy area. Children tend to play with table blocks either alone or in small groups. Legos are especially appealing to older children who may wish to work cooperatively to erect a structure.

Hollow blocks, in contrast, require a very large building area. If classroom space is at a premium and there isn't enough room to have a hollow block area in the classroom, teachers can consider the following options.

- Take over another area for a week or so, remembering that hollow block play will be a noisy activity. However, because they are so big, hollow block structures do not need as much protection as unit blocks do.

- If hallways are large enough, try using them for hollow block building.

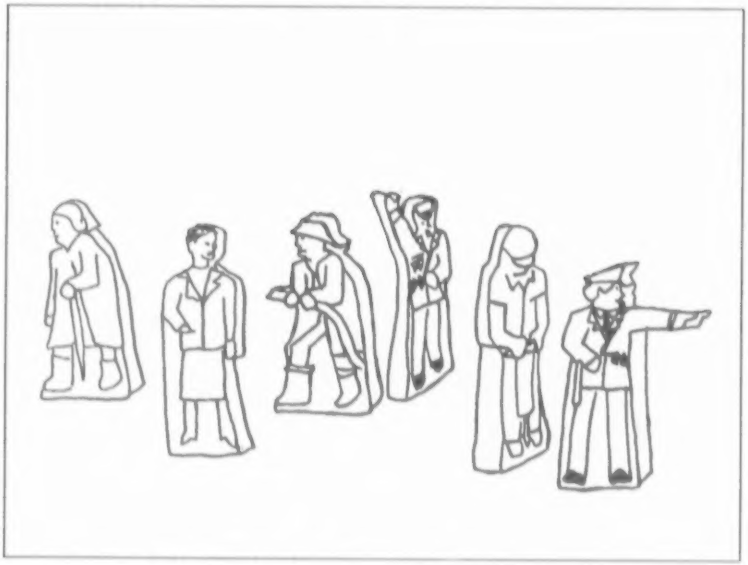
- Use hollow blocks to help transform the house corner into a new setting.

- Use hollow blocks outdoors and store them in a shed, if available, when they are not in use.

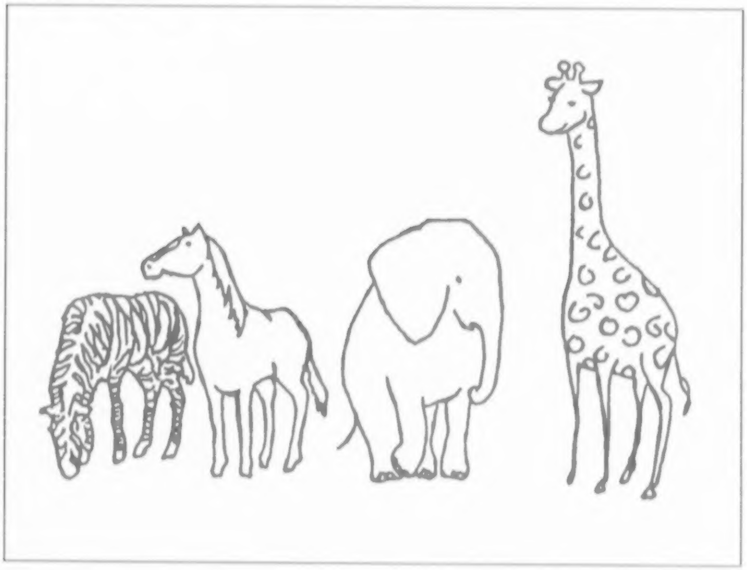
Selecting Props and Accessories for Block Play

Playing in the block corner involves more than building towers or laying blocks end to end. As mentioned, one important use of block constructions is as settings for dramatic play. To stimulate this type of activity, teachers can assemble a variety of props and accessories in the block corner.

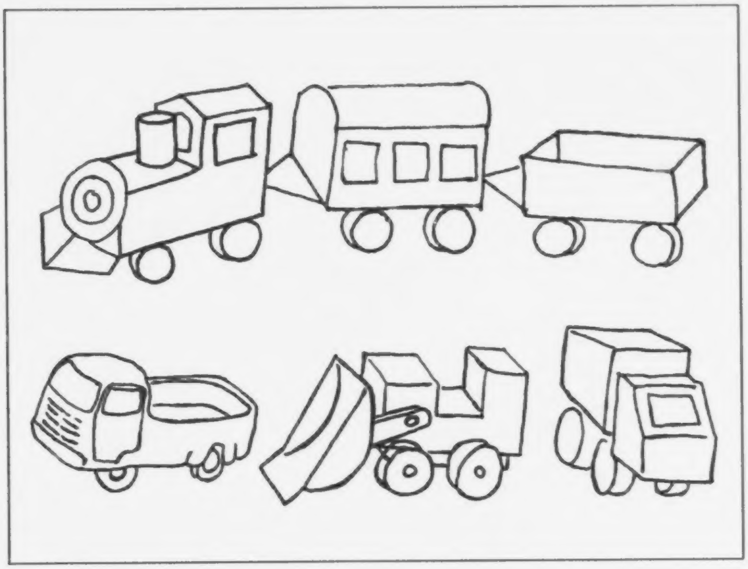
- **People**: family sets, community workers, and others representing various ethnic groups and showing men and women in a variety of roles.



- **Animals**: farm and/or zoo animals.



- **Transportation:** vehicles that include large and small cars, trucks, dump trucks, airplanes, helicopters, space ships, trains, boats, fire engines, buses, and other vehicles.



All these props should be made of hardwood or rubber and be nontoxic. Metal props can be a problem, as they often have sharp edges and dent easily. Additional props that can expand the opportunities for dramatic play include the following:

- a dollhouse with furniture and dolls;
- traffic signs;
- gas pumps;
- paper, crayons, and scissors;
- hats (construction hardhats, police and nurse caps, etc.);
- trees (e.g., from a Lego set);
- toy carpentry tools;
- castle blocks;
- play money;
- small containers;

- popsicle sticks;
- tiles, linoleum squares, rugs;
- pulleys and string;
- magazine pictures of buildings, roads, bridges;
- shells and pebbles; and
- thin pieces of rubber tubing.

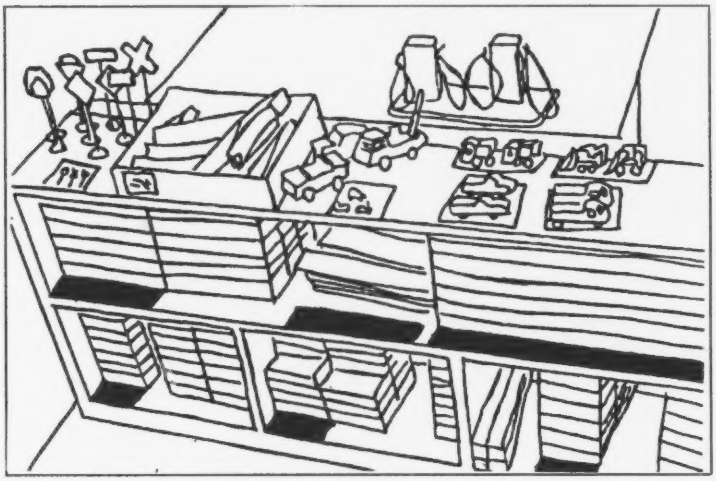
If the classroom also has a set of hollow blocks, props such as these can be used to inspire children's play:

- a pilot's or train engineer's hat;
- tickets and a box to keep props in;
- a steering wheel mounted on a box; and
- paper markers and tape to make signs.

Displaying Props and Accessories

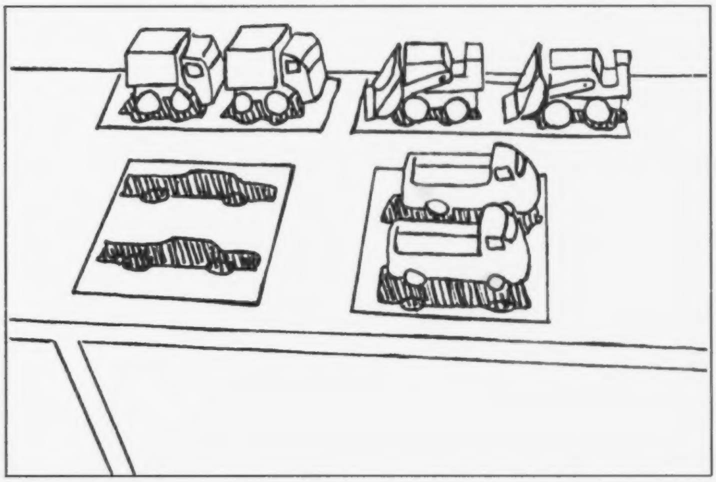
As with the blocks themselves, props and accessories need to be displayed in a manner that invites children to use them and replace them on shelves when finished. When props are arranged haphazardly, children are less likely to use them and put them away.

Grouping props together provides children with a sense of organization. In the following illustration, like objects are grouped together.

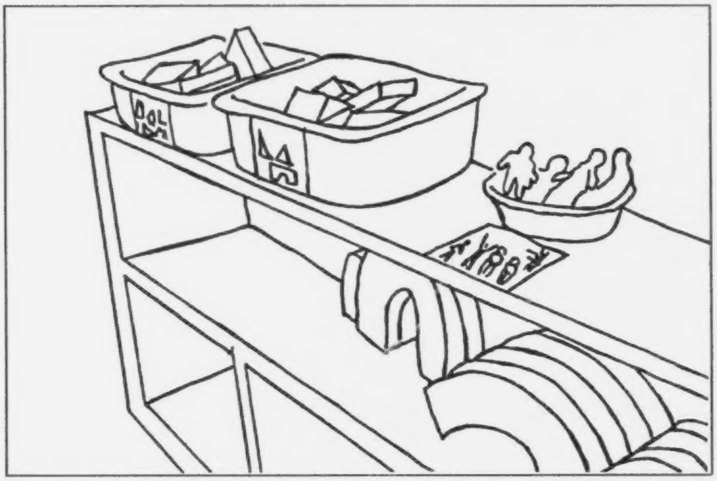


There are several ways to make shelf labels for props and accessories. One way is to use a labeling process similar to that suggested for blocks. An outline of the prop can be drawn on a piece of posterboard or cardboard, cut out, and covered with clear contact paper. In some cases an outline of the object can be traced directly onto the contact paper.

A photo of the object, covered with clear contact paper, can also be used as a label. If this is done, however, it is important to make sure that the picture is large enough for children to recognize the object's details.



Many props, such as the traffic signs or transportation toys shown earlier, can easily be placed directly on the shelf. However, in some instances there simply is not enough shelf space to store props. When this occurs, plastic basins or sturdy cardboard boxes can be used as supplemental storage space.



As shown in the preceding illustration, the basin and the shelf are both labeled so that children first sort the objects and then replace the props. One basin has dollhouse furniture and another has zoo animals. A basket is used for the family figures. A photo of each set appears in front of the storage basin so that children know where each set belongs. Here, too, clean-up becomes an opportunity for children to sort and match like objects.

Caring for Blocks

By thoughtfully laying out the block corner, teachers automatically maximize the probability that blocks will be well cared for. Adequate space, storage, and labeling ensure that blocks are well-housed and not thrown against each other during the clean-up process.

Wooden blocks do, however, require some additional minimal care if they are to last for many years. First, sandpaper should be used periodically to eliminate rough or splintery edges. Commercial wood polish or linseed oil can then be used to provide an additional protective coating.

On a regular basis, dirty blocks should be washed with oil soap and then scrubbed with a stiff brush and soap and water. Like all wooden objects, hardwood blocks should not be soaked. Once washed, they should be dried thoroughly and polished as described above.

Ensuring Children's Safety in the Block Corner

Block play carries with it a natural concern for children's physical safety. The possibility of toppling accidents or block-throwing accidents is a concern shared by most teachers. However, the probability that such incidents will occur can be greatly reduced if teachers set down and enforce basic, realistic rules to govern children's block play. The *Creative Curriculum* suggests that teachers establish rules such as these for the block corner.

- Children can knock down only their own building, not someone else's.
- Blocks are for building, not for throwing.
- Blocks remain in the block corner.

Moreover, many safety-related problems can be eliminated if teachers incorporate the room arrangement ideas presented in this section. To reiterate, here are some of the important design concerns that affect safety.

- Traffic patterns should be such that children can move to and from the block area without disturbing each other.
- Teachers must have an unobstructed view of the block corner over shelves and any cubbies that enclose it.
- The number of children who can use the block corner at the same time should be limited to a realistic number, on the basis of the area's size.

The information presented in this section has provided an effective framework for establishing an appropriate area for block play. By structuring the environment in ways that enhance children's block play, the teacher can set the stage for learning. The next section offers specific strategies and techniques that teachers can use to enhance learning in the block corner.

IV. Interacting with Children in the Block Corner: The Teacher's Role

Once the block corner is set up, how do teachers stimulate play and creativity? How can teachers be responsive to children and enrich their play experiences? What types of additional props and materials are needed to encourage dramatic play and to help children learn new concepts and skills while playing with blocks?

The answers to these questions lie in discovering how and when to intervene--without interfering--in children's play. Teachers achieve this balance when they observe what children are doing in the block corner, react to and reinforce children's actions there, and extend and enrich children's block play.

Observing Children in the Block Corner

What happens in the block corner depends on the age of the children in the group, whether they have played with blocks before, and whether it is the beginning, middle, or end of the school year. What happens also depends on certain particular factors relevant to the children's physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development. To help pinpoint children's developmental levels so that the learning experience can be individualized to meet every child's needs, teachers should make use of the best and most direct observation methods.

When observing children, it is helpful to have a focus. Here are three basic ways of observing:

- Follow one child in the block corner for the entire time that the child remains there or for at least 10 minutes of that time.
- Observe all the children in the block corner for one entire play period or at least 20 minutes of that time.
- Observe the children in the block corner every day over a period of a week.

The following questions may also be helpful in guiding the observation process:

- What materials do children select?
- Do children seem to know beforehand what they wish to select, or do they simply take whatever is available?
- Which materials hold the children's interest the longest? Which do not seem to hold their attention?
- Which children play together most often?
- Do children select appropriately challenging tasks?

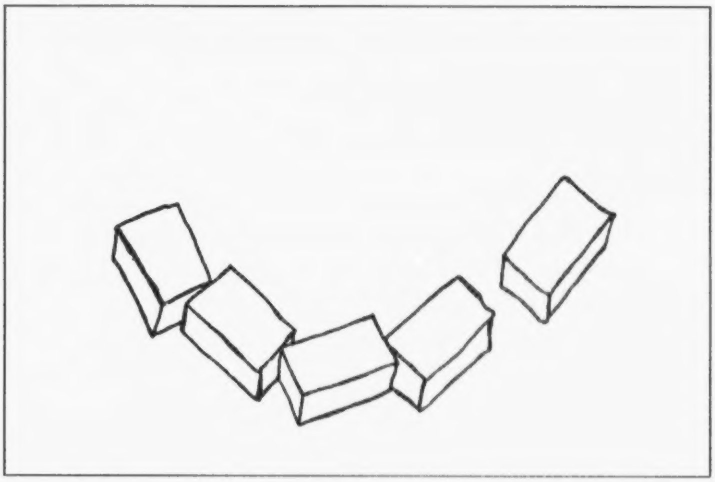
- Do children persist at a task until it is completed?
- Do children describe their structures and their activities?
- Do children identify solutions to construction problems?

In addition to providing developmental data on the children, observations provide important clues as to what new materials may be needed and how well the location and set-up of the block corner are actually working in the classroom.

Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Block Play

At the same time that teachers are collecting observational data, they can also obtain firsthand data on children's developmental levels, needs, and interests by talking directly with children as they work with blocks. While doing this, teachers have the opportunity to react to children's block play and reinforce what is going on.

One of the most important teaching techniques for block play is to talk to children about their structures. Although this sounds simple, many teachers find this task difficult, especially when the children involved are young and their constructions minimal. For example, talking to a child about the construction shown below might prove difficult for some teachers.



The easiest response to this situation would be to say "that's a nice building" or "you did a good job." But judgmental statements such as these say nothing at all about what the child did, nor do they give the child a chance to tell the teacher something about the arrangement of the blocks.

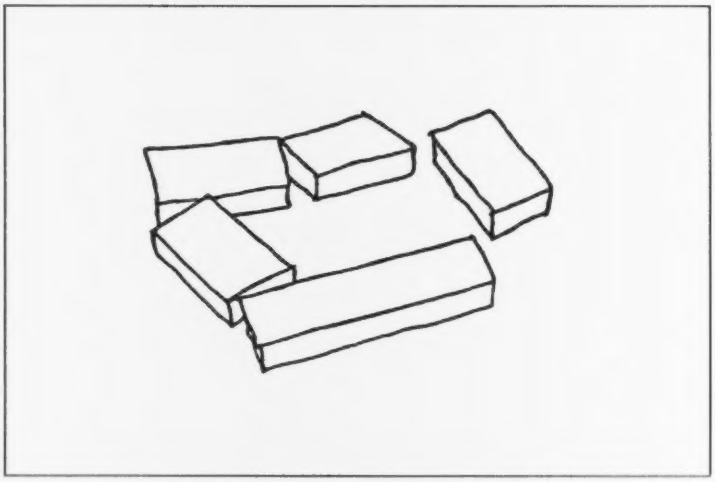
The key to talking to children about their block play is to use statements that describe what a child has done, or to ask open-ended questions that encourage children to talk about their work. This technique is also helpful for children who have difficulty expressing themselves and may be unable, at least in the beginning, to describe what they have built. Teachers can talk about the following:

- **what blocks were used:** "You found out that two of these blocks make one long block."
- **where the blocks were placed:** "You used four blocks to make a big square."
- **how many blocks were used:** "You used all the blocks to make the road."
- **whether the blocks are all the same:** "All the blocks in your road are exactly the same size."
- **what is noteworthy about the design:** "Your building is as tall as the shelf."
- **how the blocks are connected:** "All your blocks are touching."
- **how the blocks are balanced:** "Those long blocks are holding up the short ones."

Descriptions such as these build children's vocabularies at the same time that they help the teacher to observe how each child is doing developmentally.

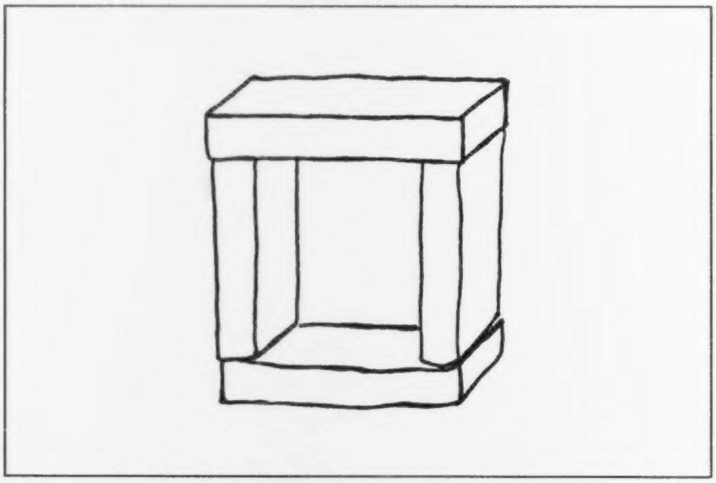
In commenting on the children's structures, it is important to avoid making judgmental comparisons. This does not mean, however, that descriptive comments should not be made. For example, a teacher might say: "I see your structure is different than Jane's. You made your blocks stand up and she made hers lie down. Hers all touch and yours are spread out." This points out differences without being judgmental and teaches children the concepts of "touch" and "spread out." By describing specifically what the child has done, the teacher also conveys respect for the uniqueness of the child's creation.

There may be children who need assistance in learning how to talk about their structures. For these children, the teacher may need to initiate the process. For example, looking at the block arrangement on the next page, the teacher might say:



- "I see you used one block that is longer than the others."
- "Look, your blocks make a space in the middle."
- "All of your blocks except one are touching."
- "You used five blocks. You made the whole building with just five blocks."
- "All your blocks are rectangles, but they're not all the same size."

Similarly, for the block structure pictured below, a teacher might make the following comments:



- "You made the top block balance. I bet that wasn't easy."
- "Some of your blocks lie down and some stand up."
- "If I get down on my knees, I can look through it."
- "You had to be very careful when you made this building."

Comments such as these serve several purposes. First, they show that the teacher values what the child has done. This is reinforcing to children; it encourages them to experiment with new ideas and materials and to learn from mistakes. In addition, the teacher has introduced certain words to describe what the child did. By repeatedly hearing about such concepts as under, on top of, beneath, through, less than, and more than, children learn what the words mean and thus enlarge their vocabularies. Most importantly, the process--what the children have done with blocks--rather than the outcome is reinforced.

Extending and Enriching Children's Play in the Block Corner

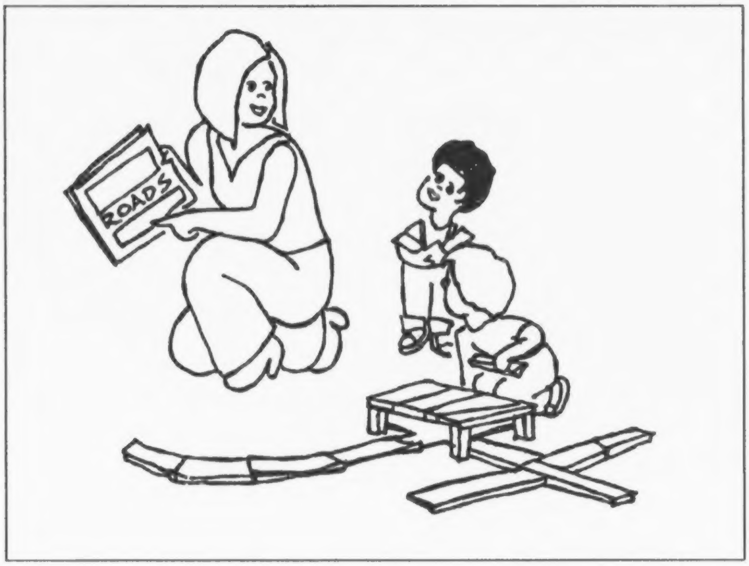
Using the information gathered through observations and conversations with children, teachers gain a good understanding of where each child is, developmentally, with regard to block play. This understanding, in turn, enables teachers to plan a strategy to help children extend their ideas and move from one stage of block play to the next. By approaching block play from a developmental perspective, teachers can enhance each child's experience with blocks.

In attempting to implement this approach, teachers may be perplexed as to where to begin. They may wonder what to do, for instance, if a child simply piles up blocks day after day. Should such a child be encouraged to move to the next developmental stage? Here are some points to consider when pondering this question.

- Piling up blocks isn't just busywork. It's an important and natural stage in block building.
- Some children need to pile blocks (or similarly to do any type of block building) over and over again. These children are likely to gain self-confidence by learning to feel comfortable with blocks.

Most children will move on to the next stage when they are ready, often by observing how other children build with blocks. However, if a child truly seems to need help or encouragement to move on to the next stage, teachers can try the following suggestions.

- Get down on the floor with the child who is frustrated over a problem and offer support to the child in solving the problem.
- Actively help the child solve a problem. For example, ask a leading question: "Do you think another block shape might work there?"

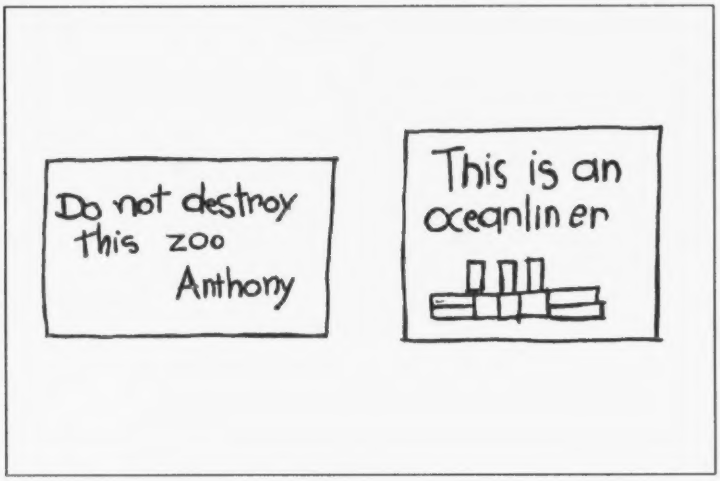


- Inspire a child who has built the same construction every day for a week by offering a book with pictures of constructions.
- Offer new accessories and props to a child to help expand the construction.
- Question the child about the type of structure and what might belong with it. For instance, ask: "Who could live in that building?" or "How will people get to that building?"

In addition to these intervention strategies, there are two other valuable ways to extend play in the block corner: sign writing and preserving buildings.

Sign Writing

Using signs to label children's structures is a good way to extend block play. First the teacher asks the child to describe what he or she has done in the block corner. Then the teacher makes a sign, recording exactly what the child has said. The child may then color the sign or add a picture to it.



Signs are extremely powerful even when children can't actually read the writing on them. They convey to the child that the teacher cares enough about the child's work to write about it on a sign.

Preserving Buildings

Sometimes when children have made a building that is very special to them, it's difficult for them to dismantle it during clean-up. If there is enough room in the block corner to leave buildings up overnight or even for a week, this is ideal. Doing so allows children to continue with a construction, which leads to more elaborate building, and to play with or in the structure. A block construction is more likely to be used as a setting for socio-dramatic play if the children have been allowed to spend an extended period of time creating and enhancing it.

Unfortunately, in many rooms the block corner has to be used for other group activities such as circle time or story time. Even in a classroom with a separate block corner, all buildings must eventually come down. However, one way to preserve a block construction before it is dismantled is to take a picture of it. Photographs serve the following purposes:

- An important message is communicated to the child: the teacher values the building even though it has to come down.
- Pictures are special. Many teachers have found that when they began to take pictures, the block corner became popular. Children wanted to build and have a picture taken of their construction--or of them with their creation.
- When photos of constructions made by the children are put in the block corner, they often serve as an incentive to the builder and to other children.

- By taking pictures of the same child's work over a period of time, teachers have a visual record of the child's progress in the block corner.

Instant cameras are particularly good to use because children can see the photos right away. Reinforcement is thus immediate.

Alternatively, block structures can be preserved in a sketch or drawing that can be hung in the block corner. This also gives the children the message that the block building is valued. Older children might be encouraged to draw pictures of the structures they especially like.

Facilitating the Development of Specific Learning Skills

All the activities described in this section promote learning. As children work in the block corner, they practice eye-hand coordination, improve their gross and fine motor skills, and learn new words. All these learnings are byproducts of block play.

Because of the nature of blocks, however, there are additional skills that children can readily acquire through block play. These include problem-solving and critical thinking skills; dramatic play skills; and basic math skills. Because of their importance, and the fact that block play so readily lends itself to the teaching of these skills, each will be highlighted next.

Problem-Solving Skills

The construction process is a natural means for children to learn how to solve problems. As soon as children start building with blocks, they are confronted with problems. A road builder may foresee the need for an exit ramp; a house builder may be stymied about how to build a window. Solving such problems can be a major challenge. For self-motivated children, the challenge is taken on with determination and zeal as they search to find answers on their own.

Coming up with a resolution demands that the child experiment with ideas through trial and error. With critical thinking, concentration, and persistence, children eventually experience the thrill of discovering an approach that will work.

Although discovery on one's own is, of course, the preferred problem-solving approach, it does not work for all children in all circumstances. Many teachers ask: "When is it appropriate for an adult to help a child who is working on a block problem?" In the *Creative Curriculum* teachers allow a child enough time to try to solve a problem alone; they intervene only if the problem becomes frustrating for the child. If intervention seems to be the appropriate action to take, the following strategies are suggested:

- Offer help with the first step in the solution and then encourage the child to think through the rest: "If I were to hold this block up, how could you make the others reach?"

- Ask questions that encourage the child to use information: "It looks like we're all out of the long blocks. What else could you use to fill up the same space?"

- Plan a walk in the neighborhood to look at buildings or roads. Help the child relate these real-life constructions to the construction problem being experienced in the block corner.

Even with intervention, as the foregoing strategies indicate, teachers can help children learn how to solve problems themselves. By giving children responsibility for thinking through a problem on their own, teachers help children learn to test options in a systematic way that will eventually lead to successful problem solving.

Dramatic Play Skills

As noted, blocks can be an ideal vehicle for encouraging dramatic play. Dramatic play not only enables children to be creative and use their imaginations but also provides a forum for children to

- replay important life experiences;
- work cooperatively with others;
- express their needs and fears;
- try out solutions to problems; and
- learn to express their inner lives in a socially acceptable manner.

In the house corner, the stage is already set for dramatic play; there is a "house" and supporting props such as a grocery store. But in the block corner, the setting for dramatic play needs to be created and imagination more heavily relied upon. For example, children must apply their creative powers to use blocks to make a zoo, a farm, a rocket ship, an apartment house, an airport, a construction site, a highway, the beach, a boat, the railroad, a city, a school, a parking garage, a favorite restaurant, a fire station, a police station, a stage for puppets, or a library.

Moreover, the block corner provides children with an opportunity to explore roles and deal with fantasy. The house corner is set up like a real-life house. Children are therefore most likely to take on the roles of parents or children in this setting. In the block corner, however, children are more likely to take on a broader set of roles and play-act a wider range of experiences.

How do teachers encourage and support this important type of play with blocks? As we have seen, teachers can pick up on what the children are doing and extend it. At other times teachers may have to take a more direct route by starting the dramatic play, stimulating it, and staying involved with it. Here are two examples that demonstrate how children can work out a dramatic theme with the teacher's support.

Example 1: The Apartment House. A three-year-old builder began by building a tall structure with several cars parked beside it. As the builder was sitting next to the structure singing a song, the teacher came along. The following dialogue took place:

Teacher: I see there are a lot of cars parked next to this building.

Builder: That's the parking lot.

Teacher: Where are all the people who own the cars?

Builder: Inside.

Teacher: Is that where they work?

Builder: No.

Teacher: Is that where they live?

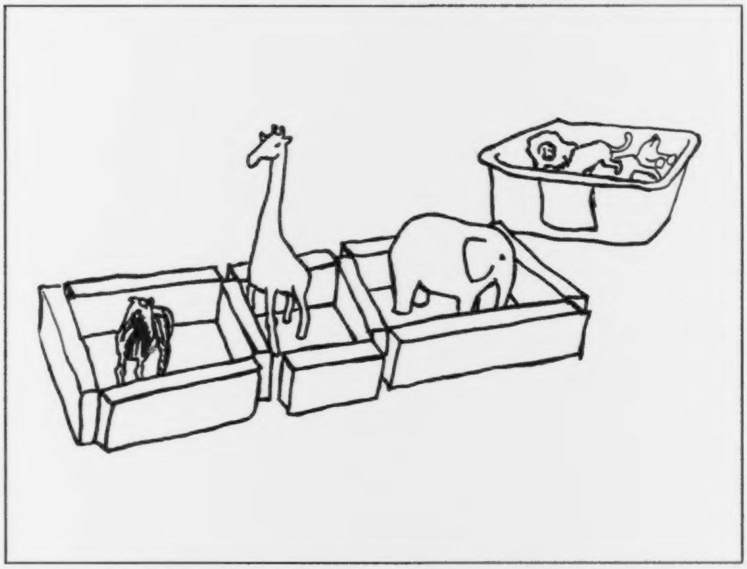
Builder: Yes. It's a compartment house.

Teacher: Oh, all of these people live in an apartment house. Is there a playground for the children?

Builder: Now there is. (The builder begins to use dollhouse furniture to improvise a playground.)

In analyzing this example, it is important to note that because the child replied with one-word answers, this teacher had to ask several questions to initiate and extend the conversation.

Example 2: The Zoo. A four-year-old builder began by getting the basket of zoo animals and some unit and double-unit blocks. She built simple enclosures and put the animals inside.



At this point, the builder seemed to stop. The teacher came along and the following dialogue took place:

Teacher: Tell me about these animals.

Builder: They're at the zoo.

Teacher: Have you been to the zoo?

Builder: Yes, lots of times.

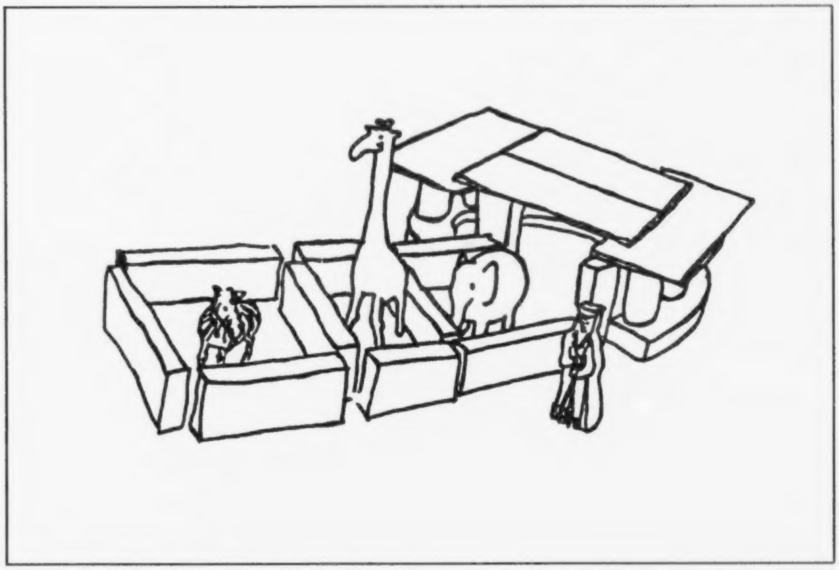
Teacher: What do you see at the zoo? What kinds of buildings do they have?

Builder: Cages for the animals--where they can go inside and outside.

Teacher: It looks like you've made an outside yard for the giraffe and the elephant. Do they have an inside house too?

Builder: Yes. (She started to make one.)

When the teacher returned five minutes later, the builder had constructed a round house with a roof and an outdoor enclosure that in fact resembled the elephant/giraffe house at the local zoo.



The child in this example was able to remember what the animals' cages looked like because she had been to the zoo. If she had not had any ideas from her own experience, the teacher could have offered her a book to look through. In this example, the builder had also used one of the wooden props of community workers (the street sweeper) to be the "zookeeper." The teacher commented on this and then made more suggestions by asking:

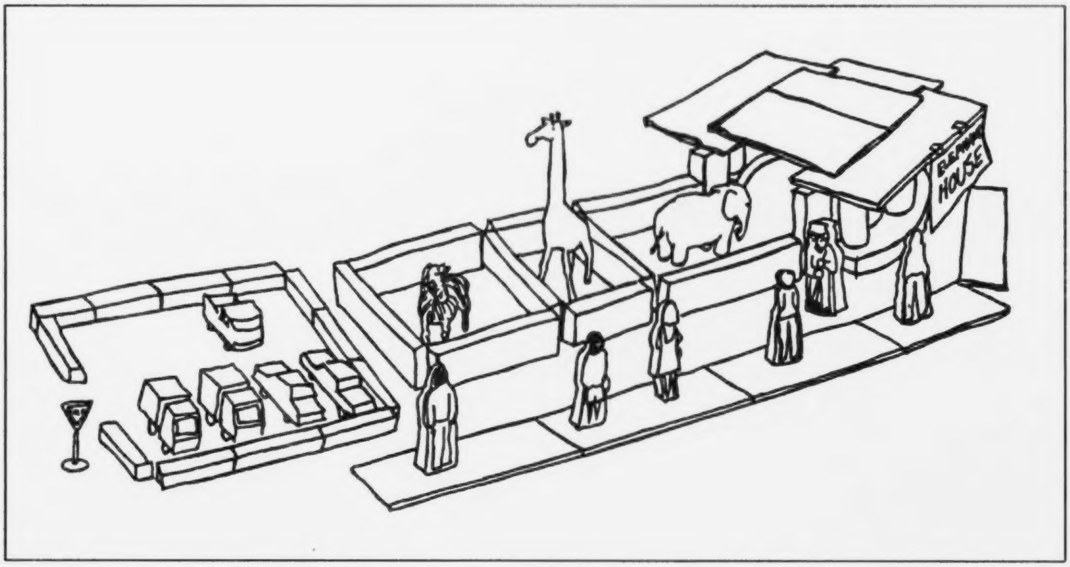
Teacher:	Who comes to the zoo?
Builder:	People--families, children. (She went to the block accessories and took four wooden block figures, which she lined up in front of the building.)
Teacher:	How will the people know what this building is?
Builder:	It would say "Elephant House."
Teacher:	I have some paper and crayons here. Would you like me to make a sign?
Builder:	Yes. (The teacher made a sign and the child taped it on the building.)
Teacher:	How do people get to the zoo from their homes?
Builder:	They drive in cars.

Teacher: And where do they put their cars while they walk around to see the animals?

Builder: There's a parking lot and it costs $1.00 to park there.

Teacher: Maybe you could make a parking lot for your visitors.

The teacher left the builder for a short while. When she returned, the builder had added walkways around the building and a car parking area with cars. The child asked for help making several other signs pointing the way to other buildings.



By conversing with the child about visitors and by naming the buildings, the teacher encouraged the child to think about the zoo from several perspectives--who comes to visit the zoo, how they come, where they walk, and where else they go. This example indicates that the teacher supported and extended the child's dramatic play with blocks in the following ways:

- observing what the child did;
- asking questions to help the child recall experiences;
- listening to what the child said;
- making suggestions based on the child's experiences; and
- helping the child by supplying props and writing signs.

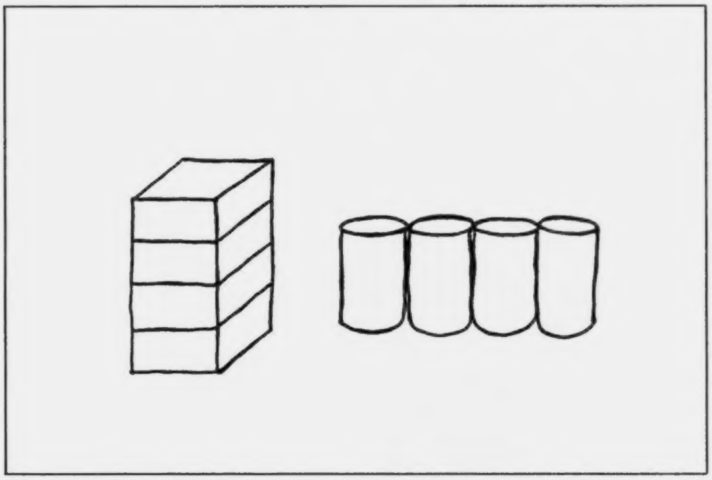
Basic Math Skills

As pointed out earlier, unit blocks are ideally suited to teaching many concepts in mathematics. Because the blocks are made in mathematical proportions and can be combined and used in many ways, they are a choice method of illustrating abstract ideas in concrete terms. With blocks, children experience firsthand such concepts as these:

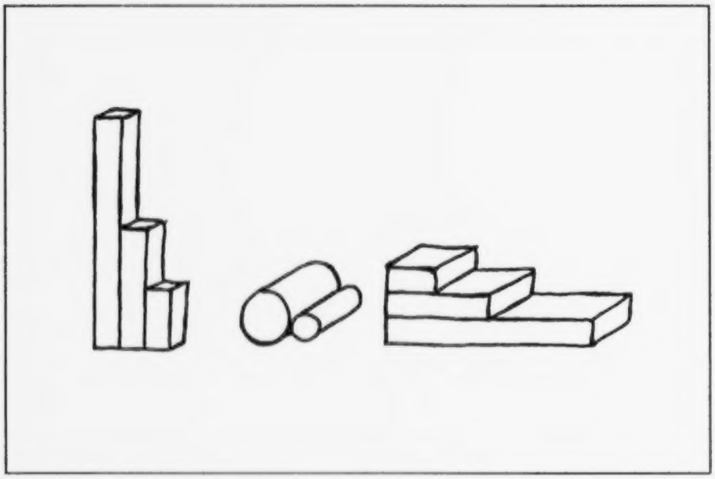
- more and less: "I have more blocks than you do!"
- taller and shorter: "My building is the tallest."
- twice as big: "I need two of those blocks to match this long one."
- names of shapes: square, rectangle, triangle, cylinder.
- numbers: three squares, four cylinders.

When playing with blocks, children also learn many logical thinking skills, including the ability to make use of classification, seriation, equivalence, and conservation. Each is briefly described below.

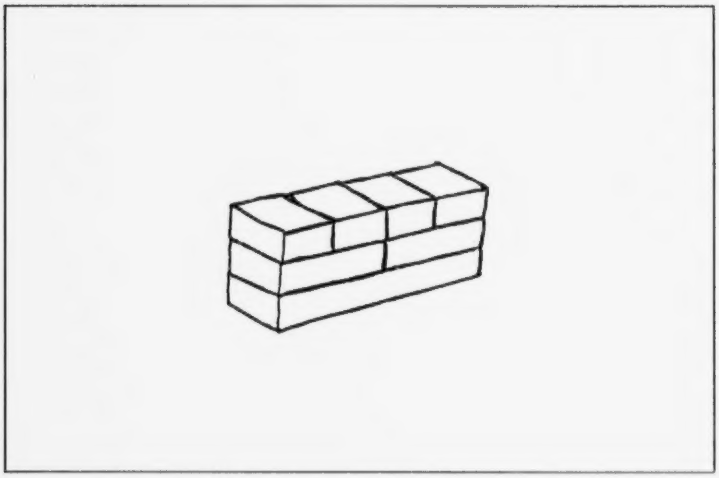
- **Classification:** Putting blocks that are alike together in a group (for example, piling up squares or lining up cylinders). At a more advanced level, children can name the different groups: "I put the squares here and the cylinders there."



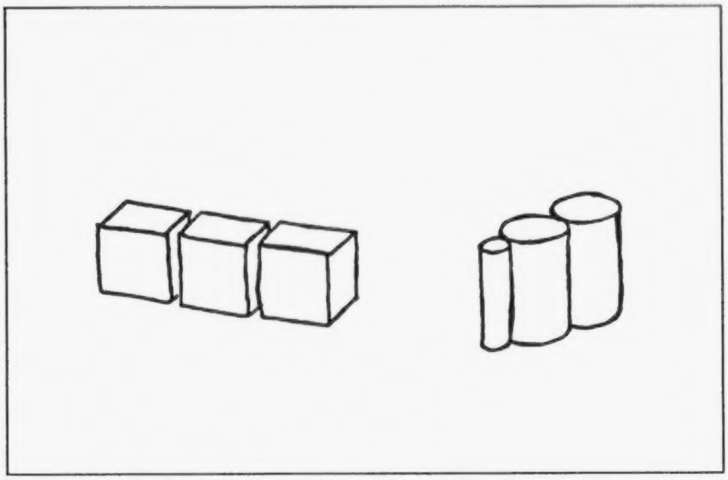
- **Seriation:** Putting items in order (for example, by height from shortest to tallest).



- **Equivalence:** Noticing relations among blocks of differing sizes and shapes (for example, four squares fill the same space as two units, which fill the same space as one double unit.)

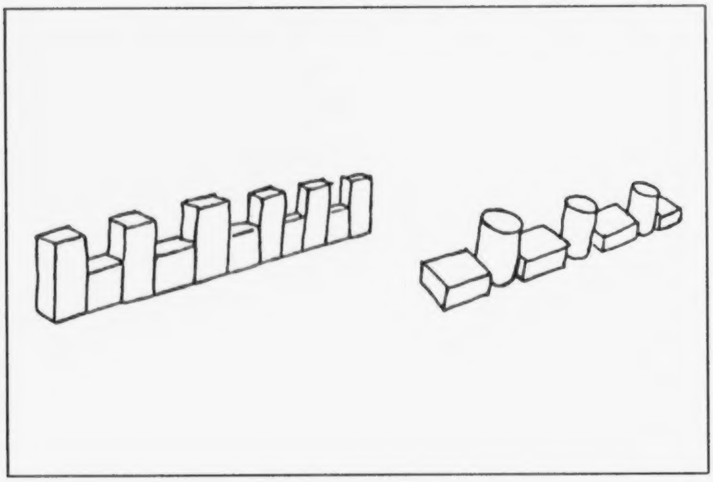


- **Conservation:** Understanding that two groupings can have the same number of blocks even if they don't look exactly the same.



All these processes can be directly illustrated to children by these exercises:

- putting blocks into groups--for example, squares in one place, triangles in another;
- setting out blocks in a deliberate order, such as smallest to largest;
- pointing out that two squares fill the same length as one unit block;
- commenting on how many of one type of block it takes to fill a space (for example, to build a road from one end of the block corner to the other); and
- making a pattern that goes on and on (such as alternating block shapes).



Planned activities such as these help children develop math skills at the same time that they are having fun playing with blocks.

Strategies for Teachers in the Block Corner

In addition to the approaches for facilitating learning just outlined, there are many things teachers can do to enhance block play in general. This section presents strategies for generating interest in block play, for helping children learn to share blocks, and for cleaning up in the block corner.

Generating Interest in Block Play

As with nearly all activities, block play does not hold the same interest for all children. Some children head straight for the block corner while others never choose blocks. It may be that those who avoid the block corner do so because they are

- afraid to try new activities;
- unsure of what to do;
- afraid of doing it incorrectly;
- afraid of the noise in the block corner;
- too busy doing other activities; or
- girls who view blocks as an activity only for boys.

One way in which a teacher can ease a reticent child into the block area is to invite that child to join the teacher in playing with blocks. If a child is overwhelmed by the noise or the number of children, it is best to choose a time when only a few children are in the block area. A teacher might say to the child, "I'm going into the block corner, would you like to come?" Or the teacher might go into the block corner, sit down, begin to build, and ask the child to help find a particular block or prop.

Overcoming gender inhibitions about blocks being "boy's play" may take a concerted effort on the teacher's part. In some classrooms the boys establish the block corner as "boys-only" territory. They tell the girls in words and actions that they aren't welcome. Moreover, girls often get the message both in the classroom and in the real world that construction work is for men. This may be another reason why girls sometimes don't feel that they belong in the block corner. As a result, they may be at an earlier developmental stage of block building than boys of the same age.

It is important, from the very beginning of the school year, to reinforce the idea that the block corner is for boys and girls. If a boy or group of boys tells a girl that she can't come into the block corner, the teacher might say, "In our class, everyone can build with blocks." Or if a boy says "she can't build!" one response might be this: "In our class everyone makes his or her own buildings. Each one is different and that's what makes them all special."

In addition to verbal messages reaffirming that girls belong in the block corner, subtle messages can be conveyed to help girls feel more secure with blocks. The teacher might display pictures of female construction workers or read a book at storytime about female builders. (Try *Mother Can Do Anything* by Joe Lasker or *Joshua's Day* by Sandra Lucas Surowiecki and Patricia Riley Lenthall.)

Helping Children Share Blocks and Props

Teaching children to share is a goal in all preschool activities. In the block corner, the demands for sharing are often more acute. Builders may have urgent needs for a large quantity of one size or for certain props.

It is helpful to remember that learning to share is a gradual accomplishment requiring time and practice. Given this, one approach endorsed by the *Creative Curriculum* is to reduce the need for sharing by putting out a selection of blocks and duplicate props for children to use. Children need to feel they have had an opportunity to possess what they want before they will be ready to share. If duplicates are put out, potential squabbles can be reduced at the same time that children are practicing learning to share.

To do this, teachers may find it helpful to enter into a sharing agreement with other classes so that duplicate blocks and props can be obtained. For example, one class could take two sets of farm animal props while the other keeps two sets of zoo animal props. After a few weeks the classrooms could trade. In this way, children needn't wait as long for the props they want, and sharing can be taught more gradually.

Cleaning Up the Block Corner

At one time or another, almost every teacher encounters problems in cleaning up the block corner. Why is it so difficult for children to clean up blocks? One reason is that children become so involved in what they are making that it is hard for them to stop. Moreover, clean-up involves destruction of something they have spent time diligently constructing. With art or table toys, children can usually finish something. In the house corner, they have to stop, but they can pick up in the same place the next day. In the block corner, however, structures often have to be dismantled. This may be particularly difficult for older children who have planned constructions and want to continue playing with them. Even when their structures have been preserved with a photograph or sketch, the children still find it difficult to break them down.

Another common reason for problems with clean-up is that children become frustrated by the task. When the block corner has been well-used, all or most of the blocks and props are on the floor. The task of putting them all away may seem overwhelming to children.

There are, however, several things that teachers can do to make clean-up less frustrating and more satisfying for children. The key is to offer just enough help so that children begin the task. Eventually, they should be able to start and complete clean-up by themselves. Here are some hints.

- On a day when all the blocks have been used, allow extra time for clean-up so that children don't feel quite as rushed. If adults assist, the task usually becomes more manageable for children.

- Help the children get started. Remind them that the shapes on the back of the shelves tell them where the blocks go. Assign each child a shape to put away, and assign different children to each type of prop. After doing this for several days, the children should be able to organize the task on their own.

- Make clean-up time into a game. This is especially helpful at the start of the year. Some examples:

  Give each child a "ticket" with a block shape on it. The child then puts away all blocks of that shape.

  Say to each child, "Bring me all the blocks that look like this one." As children bring all blocks of one shape, show them where on the shelf the shape belongs by having them compare the shape to the labels until they find the right one.

  Declare a number for the day: "Today we'll clean up the blocks by threes." Each child then collects three blocks at a time and puts them away.

- Involve children other than the builders in cleaning up the block corner. This makes the effort a group project and encourages children to view clean-up as a cooperative effort.

- Give children five minutes' notice that clean-up time is coming. It is helpful both to tell the children individually and to give each child an idea of how much time he or she has left: "You have enough time to finish the road but not to build another one."

- Be flexible; if a child is truly engrossed in block play, allow the child to continue past the free play period, if possible. Children appreciate being treated as individuals in this way and will learn that everyone gets the privilege when it is needed.

- Whenever possible, allow a particularly large or elaborate structure to remain standing until the next day so that the children can continue their play. This makes it easier to say: "I know you want to keep playing apartment house, but it's time to clean up. We'll leave the building up and you can play with it again tomorrow (or this afternoon)."

This section has outlined specific strategies and techniques that teachers can use in interacting with children in the block corner. The goal of this section has been to ensure that while children are at play, they are also gaining cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical skills. Through a process of observing, reacting, reinforcing, and enriching, teachers can ensure that learning does indeed take place. The next section explores how this learning can be extended to the home environment.

V. Supporting Children's Block Play: The Parent's Role

As with all aspects of the *Creative Curriculum*, block play as a tool for learning achieves its fullest potential when it is supported in the home environment. Depending on the type of program, parents may or may not have previously observed children playing with blocks at school. Even those who have watched children in the block corner may not fully appreciate all the learning that is going on there. If teachers help parents understand the value of blocks and the role they play in a developmentally appropriate curriculum, parents can better support this activity at home.

Helping Parents Appreciate the Value of Blocks

One of the ways to introduce parents to the value of blocks is to have a block workshop. Presented below are some guidelines for conducting this type of activity.

- Hold the workshop in the classroom so that parents can use the block corner just as their children do.

- Give parents a chance to explore the blocks. For those who have never used blocks before, it might be fun to allow parents some time on the floor to actually use blocks themselves.

- Ask three or four parents to select some blocks and props of their choosing. Then give them at least 10 minutes to build anything they like with these blocks. When the 10 minutes are up, ask each parent, in turn, to tell about his or her building. Explain to the parents that this is one of the ways teachers encourage children to talk about their buildings. After they finish talking about the experience, ask questions such as the following: "How did it feel to build?" "Did you have enough blocks?" "Was the floor surface flat enough?" "What problems might your child have when building with blocks?" "Look at your structures: are there any examples of bridges, enclosures, or symmetry?"

- Ask another small group of parents to follow specific instructions regarding block building: ask one parent to build something with a bridge, one parent to build something with windows, and one to build something with a road. (Other ideas are a ramp leading to a bridge; five steps leading to a building; and a house with windows and a roof.)

- When these parents are finished, use their buildings and the experiences of working with blocks to point out the kinds of things their children experience and learn from block play, such as the following:

  > When you are really involved in what you are doing, you sometimes don't hear the teacher telling you to stop.
  >
  > Sometimes you can't find enough blocks of the right shape, but you find others to use instead.
  >
  > You learn to cooperate, share, and plan when you use blocks.

- Discuss with parents the different concepts children learn and the skills they master when using blocks.

Teachers who have planned block workshops for parents find that through this experience, parents gain a better idea of why blocks are such an important part of the curriculum. Parents are also more likely to think about ways in which their children can use and play with blocks at home when they have learned the value of block playing at school.

Encouraging Block Play at Home

Some children have blocks at home, but many see blocks for the first time in preschool. Although a standard set of preschool unit blocks may be too expensive or cumbersome for parents to consider purchasing, there are other types of blocks appropriate for use at home, which parents can be told about. The most appropriate blocks for home use are table blocks--including small unit block sets, attribute blocks, Legos, and colored cube blocks--and large cardboard blocks. Most of these blocks are available in local toy stores. Parents interested in purchasing unit blocks can be referred to catalogues or to educational supply companies in the area. The milk-carton blocks described in Section III of this module can be made at a parent workshop and used at home.

Storing Blocks at Home

Few homes are designed with playrooms that resemble a preschool classroom; however, the same principles of room arrangement should apply to block play in the home. Whether at school or home, the ways in which blocks are arranged and stored affect how children use and care for blocks.

Teachers can give the following practical suggestions for storing blocks at home:

- Table blocks and Legos can be stored in shoe boxes, heavy cardboard boxes, or plastic tubs or containers. Parents should be cautioned not to use the boxes blocks originally come in for storage, as these containers tear easily.

- Larger sets of table blocks and standard unit blocks can be stored on a book shelf or an old TV cart. Parents should be cautioned that using a large box for storage makes it difficult for the children to find what they need. Moreover, clean-up will probably consist of throwing everything back in the box. If a large, sturdy cardboard box is the only available space, it can be turned on its side and the blocks stored much as on a book shelf.

- Children need enough space to play with blocks. Parents can decide where in the house is the most appropriate space to use blocks--in the playroom or kitchen, in the child's room, or outdoors.

- Table blocks can be used on a floor or on a table or counter. An interesting idea is to make a low table from a piece of plywood that rests on short wooden horses. Children can use this type of platform for blocks, art, or almost any type of play.

Activities Parents Can Do at Home

When parents understand the goals of the *Creative Curriculum*, they have a better idea of what the child is doing in school and can thus carry over the same principles at home.

- The parent should help *create a learning environment* for children by providing materials--in this case, blocks and props.

- The parent should *react* to what the child does with blocks: ask the child about block structures, support the child's efforts, and acknowledge successes.

- The parent should *reinforce* what the child is doing with blocks by taking pictures or helping the child make signs that describe the child's buildings.

- The parent should further *enrich* the child's experience by providing new props, such as a poster or book, a hat, or art supplies for making props. The parent can talk with the child about what is being built and acknowledge the child's pride in what has been accomplished.

By encouraging parents to take an active role in their child's block activities, teachers can help ensure that children receive consistent messages about the value of block play. With parent participation, what teachers say and do at school is reinforced by parents at home.

Encouraging parent involvement also directly facilitates the school program. Informed parents who are aware of the value of block play are more likely to assist the school's program than parents who do not appreciate the value of such play. For example, involved parents are likely to want to participate in school-related functions involving blocks, such as making blocks from milk cartons or polishing hardwood blocks. Because they appreciate that their efforts will contribute to their child's learning, they are predisposed to viewing these activities as worthwhile ventures and not as parental busywork.

It is a basic tenet of the *Creative Curriculum* that parent involvement enhances all classroom learning. As shown in this section, when there is a bond between classroom and home learning, children's block play is greatly facilitated. Block play in this context truly becomes an arena in which children can make strides in their cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth while they enjoy exploring the exciting world of blocks.

VI. For Further Reading on Blocks

Hartley, Ruth E., Lawrence Frank, and Robert Golderson. "In the Block Corner", Chapter 4 of *Understanding Children's Play*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.

Hirsch, Elizabeth S. (ed.). *The Block Book* (rev. ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1984.

Johnson, Harriet. *The Art of Block Building*. New York: Bank Street College of Education Publications, 1962.

House Corner

I. Introduction to the House Corner: Philosophy and Theory 117

- What Is the House Corner and Why Is It Important? 117
- Developmental Stages in the House Corner 117

II. Children at Play in the House Corner: Goals and Objectives 120

- Goals for Children in the House Corner 120
- Learning Objectives for Children in the House Corner 121

III. Setting Up the House Corner: The Physical Environment 123

- Structuring the House Corner 123
- Selecting Materials For the House Corner 125
- Displaying Materials in the House Corner 131

IV. Interacting with Children in the House Corner: The Teacher's Role 135

- Observing Children's Dramatic Play 135
- Extending and Enriching Children's Dramatic Play 139

V. Supporting Children's Dramatic Play: The Parent's Role 145

- Teaming with Parents 145
- Encouraging Dramatic Play at Home 146

VI. For Further Reading on the House Corner 148

I. Introduction to the House Corner: Philosophy and Theory

What Is the House Corner and Why Is It Important?

As its name implies, the house corner refers to an area of the preschool classroom that is dedicated to "playing house." In the house corner there may be props and child-sized versions of household appliances, utensils, and furniture for children to use in their play. There may also be adult and children's clothing available for children to use in representing various family and community members. In the house corner children are free to enact the everyday lives of parents, siblings, grandparents, neighbors--and themselves.

But the uses of the house corner go far beyond this one activity. It is an area in which children can participate in all types of dramatic play--creating environments as strange and exciting as a space station or as typical as a shoe store. Although the familiar home environment is the most common theme for dramatic play, children in the house corner can also create worlds inhabited by both real and imaginary characters. Dinosaurs and goblins can just as easily be found in the house corner as can family members.

Nearly everyone can appreciate the fact that children have a great deal of fun in the house corner. Children love playing "make-believe." It is easy to see the delight a child takes in acting like a parent, performing superdeeds like a TV hero, or being a demanding baby. In fact, children seem to crave this type of activity. In one research study on this topic, experimenters removed the house corner of a preschool classroom and observed how children reacted. The researchers found that within three days, children formed their own area for dramatic play. Hollow blocks, tables, and other classroom objects were being used by children to stage dramatic play. Clearly, children so missed the house corner that they took it upon themselves to recreate one.

Why is dramatic play so important to young children? It is important because it offers children a forum in which they can safely act out fears and relive life experiences. Through dramatic play, children can take on roles they fear and learn to control them. To illustrate, a child who has to go into the hospital for an operation can pretend to be the doctor in charge. By assuming the doctor's role, the child experiences "the other side" and attempts to gain control over very real fears.

Dramatic play also offers children opportunities to learn. As children act out roles, they develop many new skills. They learn about themselves, their families, and society around them. They become more physically adept at performing small motor skills. And probably most importantly, they learn to cooperate with others by negotiating roles and playing out scenes.

Developmental Stages in the House Corner

To appreciate the potential of the house corner as a setting that promotes children's growth and development, it is helpful to understand and recognize the stages of dramatic play that children go through. Like all areas of learning, dramatic play is developmental in nature. Children move through a progression of stages in their play in this area. The beginning stage involves simple, uncomplicated play, and the advanced stage represents more complex, inventive play. Knowledge of these stages enables teachers to set realistic expectations and apply appropriate strategies for expanding and enriching children's dramatic play.

The stages of dramatic play are summarized below.

Stage 1: Imitative Role Play

In this initial stage of play, which begins as early as age one, children try to act, talk, and dress like people they know. Children in this stage use real objects as props to introduce an element of reality into their play. For instance, a child may pick up a telephone and pretend to "talk on the phone like Mommy" or hold a doll and "feed the baby."

Stage 2: Make-Believe Play

In this next stage, children enrich their world through imagination. They no longer depend solely on concrete props for role playing. A string, for example, can represent a firefighter's hose, or an envelope can serve as Mommy's briefcase. The ability to make-believe opens up the world of play beyond the scope of real props or costumes. At the same time, children learn to use their imaginations to invent actions and situations. No longer is dramatic play confined to real-life events. Thus, children can use this play to help them act out particular feelings or deal with fears and worries.

Stage 3: Socio-Dramatic Play

Socio-dramatic play emerges at the time children begin seeking the company of others, often at about age three or four. Socio-dramatic play includes elements of imitative play and make-believe play; however, it stands apart from the earlier stages in that it requires verbal interaction between two or more children. Because of its shared nature, socio-dramatic play necessitates a planning of roles: one child must choose to be the teacher and the other the student; one child can be a firefighter and the other a would-be victim. Hence, socio-dramatic play, with its more complex story lines and adventures, also requires that children spend a significant amount of time in this type of play. At this stage of development, children are likely to stay with a play episode longer than during the earlier stage of imaginative play.

Factors That Influence Developmental Stages

These stages of dramatic play are presented as indicators of children's development. A child will progress through these stages at his or her individual pace--which may or may not be reflective of the child's actual chronological age, for two reasons. First, each child has a unique developmental timetable. One child may quickly pass through the first two stages while another child happily stays in the first stage for months on end. Both children can be considered to be playing age-appropriately. The second reason for the variation in children's ages at each stage of development has to do with several outside factors that influence children's play. These factors include real-life experiences, parental involvement and attitudes, and television and movies.

The influence of these factors on children's play may be described as follows. Young children begin dramatic play by drawing on their own experiences for ideas of what to do.

For instance, almost every four-year-old child has some notion of what a firefighter does. This may come from:

- seeing fire engines racing down the street;
- visiting the fire station;
- knowing a fire-fighter--a relative, friend, or neighbor;
- seeing a real fire;
- being involved in a real fire;
- seeing fires, fire engines, and firefighters on television; and
- talking with other people about firefighters.

The breadth and depth of the child's experiences with firefighters will be reflected in his or her play. As would be expected, the child with more experience will have more ideas to bring to dramatic play.

Young children's dramatic play is also affected by parental attitudes about play and fantasy. When children come from families where imaginary playmates or storytelling are frowned upon, they are less likely to have highly developed dramatic play skills. In contrast, children whose parents view fantasy as a positive attribute are likely to enter preschool well-equipped to play in the house corner.

The mass media--in particular television--also have an influence on children's stages of development. These media bombard children with a constant flow of fantasy creations and imaginary happenings. Depending on the child, this exposure may bring about two very different reactions. For some children, viewing the fantasy on TV fulfills their need for creative and imaginative expression. These children are content to let TV vicariously do their dramatic play for them. In contrast, some children watch the fantasy on TV and recreate many of the characters and situations in their own play.

In sum, children come to their preschool with varying experiences with, exposure to, and attitudes toward dramatic play. It remains the task of the preschool teacher, therefore, to help each child progress through the stages of dramatic play at that child's own pace.

The next section presents and elaborates the goals and objectives for enhancing children's development through dramatic play.

II. Children at Play in the House Corner: Goals and Objectives

Goals for Children in the House Corner

The house corner is an ideal setting for learning. Teachers, working together with children on role playing, make-believe play, and socio-dramatic play, have a unique opportunity to facilitate children's growth and development. To assist teachers in this role, the *Creative Curriculum* specifies the following set of goals for children at play in the house corner.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To develop planning skills.
- To develop problem-solving skills.
- To develop language skills.
- To develop classification skills.
- To refine creative powers.
- To apply knowledge to new situations.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To refine social skills.
- To appreciate the relationship of the individual to society.
- To develop self-understanding.
- To cooperate with others.
- To develop a positive self-image.

Goals for Physical Development

- To improve eye-hand coordination.
- To improve small muscle abilities.
- To refine visual discrimination.

These broad goals set the parameters for learning; however, precisely what learning activities take place in the house corner should, of course, be an outgrowth of the individual child's needs, interests, and developmental level. These goals serve mainly as guideposts to help teachers plan.

Learning Objectives for Children in the House Corner

To assist teachers in designing their programs, the *Creative Curriculum* further defines the foregoing goals through a listing of appropriate learning objectives for children in the house corner. Again, the point should be underscored that these objectives are offered only as guidance. The actual objectives used in the classroom will and should be chosen by individual teachers with the particular needs of each child in mind.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To use symbols to represent real objects and situations.
- To identify and plan play episodes with others.
- To identify solutions to problems that arise during play (e.g., "What are we going to feed this baby? There's no cereal in the house! We'll need to go to the store").
- To classify props according to common characteristics (e.g., "You put away the cooking utensils and I'll put away the things for eating").
- To arrange objects according to size.
- To persevere at a task by remaining involved in a play episode for increasing periods of time.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To interact with others by taking on roles and play acting.
- To play cooperatively with others, take turns, and share materials.
- To demonstrate an understanding of the social expectations and attitudes of others.
- To re-enact life experiences through dramatic play.
- To re-enact frightening or worrisome events through play activities.
- To demonstrate empathy for others through role playing.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To enhance small muscle control by putting on dress-up clothes and snapping, buckling, zipping, and buttoning.
- To use eye-hand coordination by dressing dolls and matching pots and pans with outlines on the shelves where they are stored.
- To use visual discrimination skills by matching and grouping like objects, such as dishes or utensils.

The learning objectives listed here are intended to serve as a starting point for the teacher designing an appropriate program for children at play in the house corner. The next section presents a plan for setting up the house corner so that the goals and learning objectives just discussed can be fully achieved.

III. Setting Up the House Corner: The Physical Environment

Structuring the House Corner

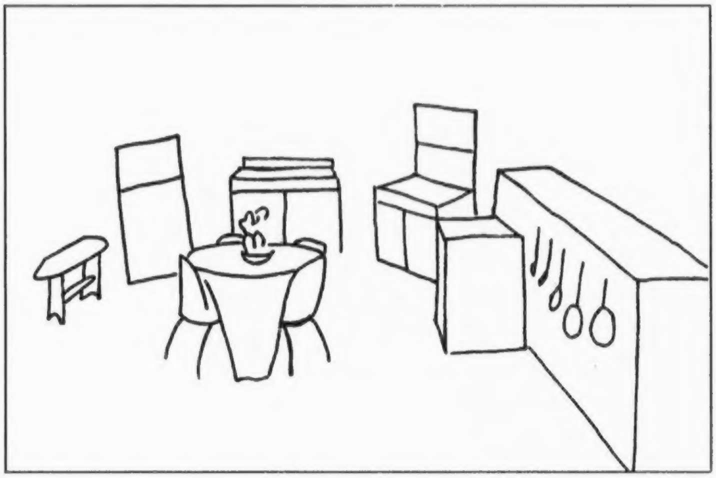
The location of the house corner and the way in which it is set up have a direct effect on how children use the area and consequently on what learning takes place. In arranging the room to set up a house corner, teachers should consider the following design features.

The House Corner Should Be Enclosed

Enclosing the house corner on three sides creates a clearly defined space. This in effect gives children a secluded stage area for performing their dramatic play episodes. Enclosing the area also makes it easier for children to keep track of the props and materials housed in this play area and to return them to their proper places during clean-up.

If the house corner is located in a corner of the room, there will be two walls to use as dividers. Additional walls can be created by

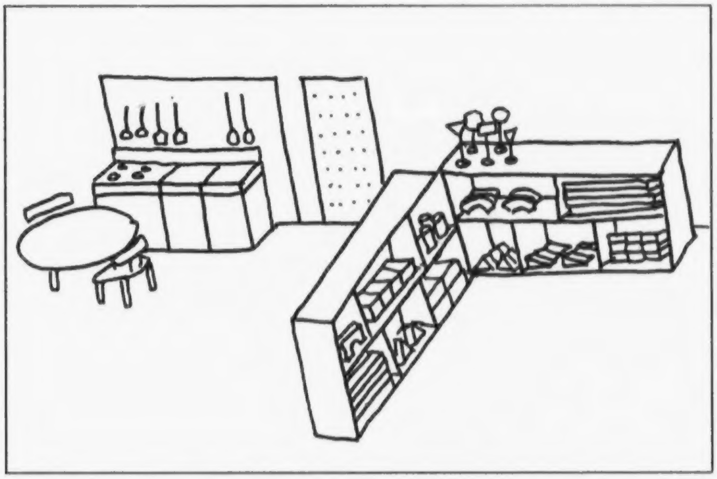
- using the back of a shelf in an adjoining area as a wall;
- placing one shelf perpendicular to another that is serving as a wall, to create an L-shaped area; or
- arranging the furniture in the house corner itself to create an enclosed area.



Another way to set off the house corner from other classroom areas is to put all or part of it on a platform. This truly creates the impression of a stage--and what could be a more ideal environment for dramatic play? To create a platform, a piece of plywood can be set on cinder blocks and covered with rug scraps. Another way to create a loft area is to include a bunk bed in the house corner.

The House Corner Should Be Near Another Noisy Interest Area

So as not to disturb children who are performing quiet activities such as reading, it makes sense to locate the house corner adjacent to another area where children are actively playing. One suggested location for the house corner is next to the block corner. This is suggested not only because block building--like dramatic play--is a noisy activity, but also because both of these interest areas engage children in dramatic activities. As children become more skilled in dramatic play, they may find it handy to be able to borrow props from the block area to assist their dramatic adventures in the house corner.



The House Corner Can Be Divided into Manageable Play Areas

In selecting a classroom site for the house corner, it is helpful to select an area that readily lends itself to further subdivisions. Research has shown that children play best in areas that are "cozy." Large, undivided spaces can be overpowering to children. A subdivided play space conveys a sense of security to children. The techniques described earlier for creating a split-level or loft area within the house corner also work as a means of dividing floor space into smaller areas.

Selecting Materials for the House Corner

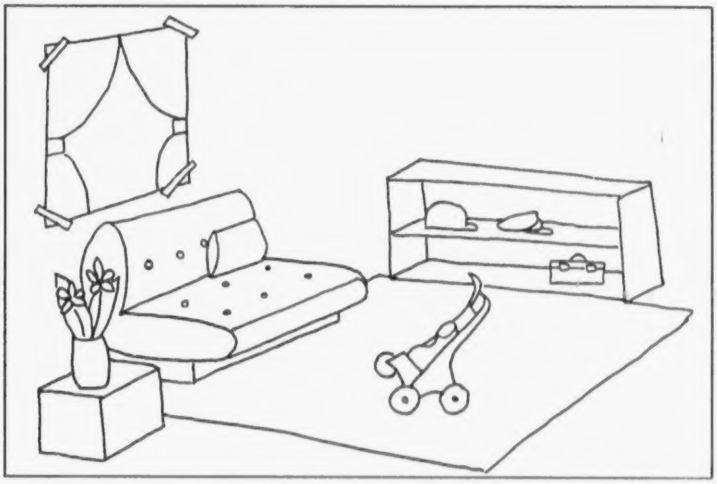
Providing a Homelike Setting

As noted in Section I, the primary activity in the house corner is that of playing house. The reason for this is a natural one: young children first play at themes that are familiar to them, and the most familiar of all themes is, of course, home life.

To facilitate this type of dramatic play, teachers can design the house corner to convey a homelike atmosphere. If the house corner has been subdivided, different rooms can be set up. A bedroom or sitting area and kitchen are typically selected, as they represent living spaces that lend themselves well to dramatic play. Dress-up clothes and a mirror can be placed in the bedroom area; a stove, table and chairs, and empty food containers can outfit the kitchen.

Painting or covering the walls with wallpaper or contact paper lends both warmth and reality to the rooms. Real or plastic flowers also convey a warm feeling. Photographs of children and families hung at the children's eye level increase the homelike nature of the area.

If there isn't a real window in the house corner, one can be made on the wall with tape and curtains. Rug scraps or an inexpensive piece of secondhand carpet also help make the house corner a soft, warm place to play. Additional furniture can be donated or made (e.g., the back seat of a junked car can be used as a couch).



In decorating the house corner, teachers should represent the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the children in the group. This is important because the more familiar and comfortable all children are in the house corner setting, the more likely they will be to use it for dramatic play.

Selecting Equipment and Materials for the House Corner

In selecting materials for the house corner, teachers should look for those props and equipment which best convey the message that "this is my home." Although too many props could be overwhelming, the guiding principle is that the richer the house corner environment, the more expressive and creative children will be in it.

The house corner should be equipped with both real materials and realistic-looking props to best facilitate dramatic play. Older children can use their imaginations to create props, but younger children, who are in the first developmental stage of dramatic play (role playing), require more concrete and realistic objects to stimulate their play.

Furniture and materials for a well-equipped house corner would include the following:

- **Furniture:**
    - Stove
    - Refrigerator
    - Child-sized table and chairs
    - Doll bed
    - Doll highchair
    - Doll stroller
    - Rocking chair
    - Full-length, nonbreakable mirror
    - Ironing board/iron
- **Kitchen equipment:**
    - Pots and pans in various sizes
    - Eating utensils
    - Cooking utensils, including serving spoons, ladles, sifters, colanders, etc.
    - Dish towels
    - Dishes--plates, cups, saucers, and bowls
    - Tea kettle or coffee pot
    - Clean-up materials--broom, mop, sponges

- **Basic props:**

  Male and female ethnic dolls

  Clock

  Telephone

  Blankets for dolls

  Empty food containers and boxes

  Plastic food

- **Dress-up clothes:**

  Jackets, skirts, dresses, shirts--for both boys and girls

  Shoes and boots

  Ties and scarves

  Costume jewelry

  Hats and wigs (unless prohibited by local licensing requirements)

  Suitcases, pocketbooks, briefcases, wallets, keys

In selecting materials and props, teachers should be guided by the developmental levels of the children in their care. Children who are unfamiliar with the house corner or are tentative in their dramatic play should be introduced to only a limited number of props. More props can be added as children become comfortable.

Care should also be given to selecting props that are nonsexist. In particular, clothing and personal property that are characteristic of both sexes should always be available.

Selecting Materials and Equipment for Other Settings

The house corner's primary function is to present a setting where children are free to act out family relationships. Yet, as noted, the house corner is a place where unlimited dramatic play can take place. Because a young child's play is not confined to house play, the house corner should not be limiting in the environment it suggests or presents.

The house corner can be converted into many different types of settings. Teachers may wish periodically to convert one part of the house corner into a different type of setting, such as a supermarket, a laundromat, or an office. Or teachers may wish to incorporate other settings into existing areas through the use of prop boxes. As their name suggests, prop boxes are boxes filled with materials relevant to a particular theme. A "hospital" prop box, for example, could be a box filled with bandages, stethescopes, white "lab" jackets, black bags, pill bottles, hot water bottles, white sheets, and other medical-related paraphenalia. The prop box is thus a way of instantly converting the house corner into a hospital or another setting for dramatic play.

Whether teachers choose to convert part of the house corner into a new setting or to use prop boxes to enrich the home setting is a matter of personal choice that will be influenced by the amount of space available and the interests of the children. Both methods are encouraged in the *Creative Curriculum* because they both facilitate and enrich children's play.

Some of the additional settings preschool teachers may wish to incorporate into the house corner are described below.

- **Supermarket.** Children often accompany their parents food shopping. Hence, the supermarket theme evolves quite naturally in the house corner. To set up a supermarket, the following props and materials can be used:

  table or crates to create sections of the supermarket;

  shopping baskets made from cartons with a string for pulling or a dowel for pushing;

  signs for different sections--meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables (signs should be in two languages in bilingual centers);

  plastic fruits and vegetables;

  empty containers of food;

  cash registers made from cardboard boxes;

  paper or plastic money; and

  paper bags for groceries.

- **Laundromat.** Clothes in the house corner get "dirty," and children will note the need to wash, dry, and iron their clothing. A laundromat or cleaners to which children can take clothes for cleaning is therefore a natural extension of house play. The following are suggestions for setting up a laundromat area:

  A large cardboard carton can become a washing machine with a door cut out in front for loading the clothes. Dials can be drawn, or knobs that really turn can be put on the carton.

  Similarly, a dryer can be made from another carton.

  A table for folding clothes can be borrowed from the table toy area.

  An ironing board and iron may already be in the house corner.

  Chairs should be included for patrons to sit on while the laundry is in the machines.

Accessories needed include the following:

clothes to wash;

laundry baskets;

empty detergent boxes and scoops;

a clothesline and clothespins; and

magazines to read while waiting.

- **Shoe store.** The shoe store is another popular theme for dramatic play. Props for a shoe store can be quite simple:

chairs to sit on;

shoes--men's and women's, boys' and girls';

shoe boxes;

a shoe-shine kit with clear polish and rags;

a box with a shoe-shaped wedge cut out of wood;

a ruler to measure feet; and

a cash register with money.

- **Barbershop/hairdresser.** The hairdresser's shop is another setting enjoyed by children. It should be equipped with the following:

combs and brushes;

empty shampoo bottles with the labels still on;

curlers and pins;

sheets cut into smocks;

hand and table mirrors;

hat-style hair dryer without the electric cord;

hand-held dryer without the electric cord;

towels; and

basins.

- **Garage/repair shop**. Young children are often fascinated by the workings of machinery. Cars in particular hold a great deal of interest for children. A garage setting provides children with an opportunity for dramatic play while at the same time allowing them to work on motor skills development. A garage can be set up by undertaking the suggestions that follow.

  Cars can be made from cardboard or wooden crates, and features such as a real license plate, a steering wheel, and knobs and dials can be added.

  A gas pump can be created from a box with a hose attached.

  A shoe box, four empty juice cans, and a wooden stick can be used to make a car engine. Holes can be cut in the carton that are large enough for each juice can and the stick to jut through. The juice cans can be moved up and down like the pistons in an engine. The stick can be used for checking the oil.

  Traffic signs can be designed from cardboard and wooden dowels.

- **Office.** An office workplace is another natural extension of house play. To create an office area, teachers can assemble the following props:

  pads of paper;

  a stapler;

  paper clips;

  an old typewriter;

  an old adding machine or calculator;

  a telephone;

  pencils, pens, and markers;

  stamp pad and stampers; and

  a briefcase.

- **Space.** The thought of space travel is exciting to most children. Here are some ideas for arranging a place and materials for this theme.

    Make a rocket from several cartons piled on top of each other. The bottom one should be big enough to hold two children. Cut a door in the bottom carton so the children can get in and out. Put knobs inside, and include pictures of space scenes.

    Space costumes can be made using helmets with plastic or paper visors. The hose from a hair dryer can be used as an oxygen tube. Overalls with straps can be turned into spacesuits.

    The play area can be decorated with pictures of stars, the moon, the planets, and satellite pictures of earth as seen from outer space.

    The car from the garage theme can become a "moon buggy" in this locale.

    A telescope can be made from an aluminum foil or paper towel roll.

There are, of course, a wealth of other settings that teachers may wish to incorporate into the house corner. Those covered here are provided only as a representative sample of themes young children typically enjoy. Teachers are encouraged to supplement this list with their own ideas as well as those suggested by children's play.

Displaying Materials in the House Corner

The layout of the house corner should always be attractive and orderly. Children need to be able independently to find the props they want, and to return them when play is over. Because there are so many different kinds of props in the house corner, arranging them in a logical way enables children to work independently and make choices.

As a rule, all the props in the house corner should be clean and intact. Children quickly lose interest in dolls that are falling apart or in dress-up clothes that cannot be tied or snapped into place. An orderly area sends an important message to children: the house corner is an important place and needs to be taken care of. When children can easily find the props they need, less time is spent searching for materials and more time is devoted to dramatic play.

The following are some ideas for arrangement of the house corner and display of props and materials.

- Hooks are ideal for hanging hats and bags.

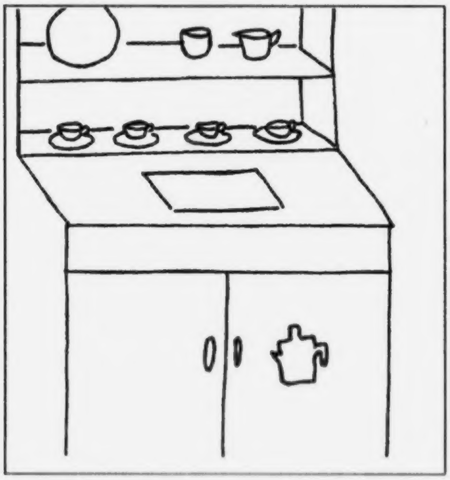
- A shoe rack or hanging shoe bag is suitable for both shoes and other small items.

- A small coat rack can be used for hanging clothes and bags.
- Three-tiered wire baskets that hang from hooks are excellent for storing plastic foods.
- Plastic storage bins are useful for costume jewelry and plastic food.

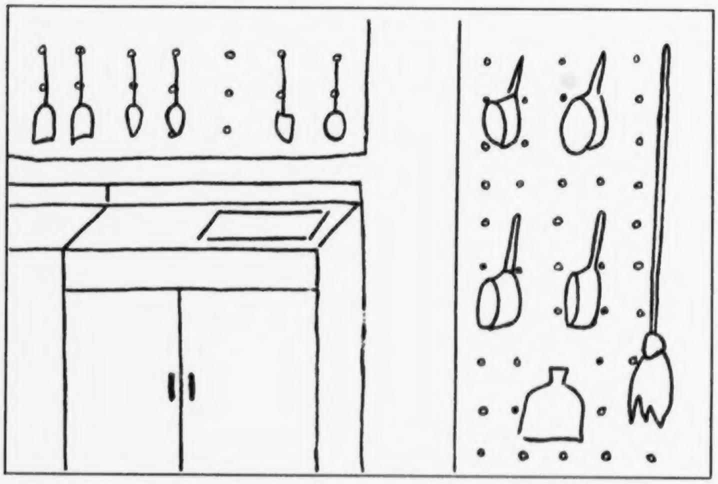
Labeling Materials and Props

Equally as important as an orderly and inviting room arrangement is the need for an organized system for storing materials. When materials and props are stored in a thoughtful fashion, children sense that the presence of these items is valued. Organized storage also facilitates both the use of props and materials and the cleaning-up process.

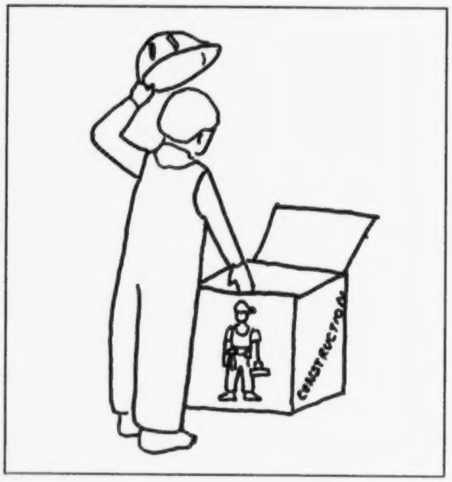
One effective system for storing materials and props relies on the use of labels. Storage areas are designated by visual representations (labels) of the objects' shapes and sizes. To illustrate, labels for kitchen supplies can be made by tracing an outline, onto solid colored contact paper, of each pot or plate to be stored. These outlined shapes are then cut out and placed on the appropriate storage shelf.



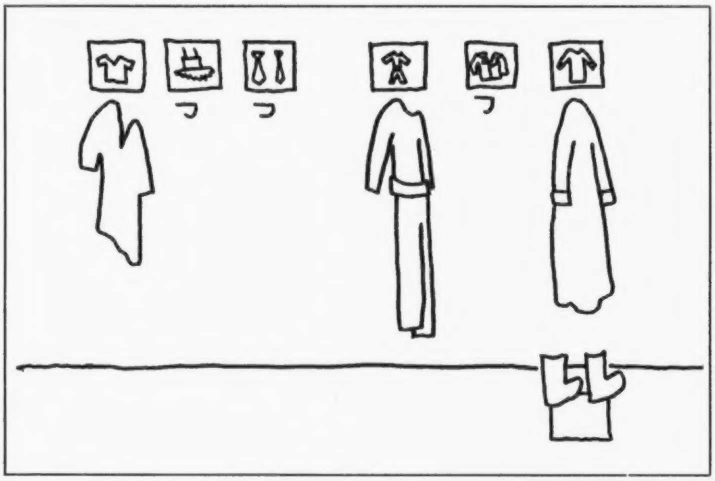
For props and materials such as serving spoons that are to be stored on a pegboard, labels can be displayed by centering them under the hooks. If actual-size labels are used, the labels will be completely covered by the items once they are returned to storage on the hooks.



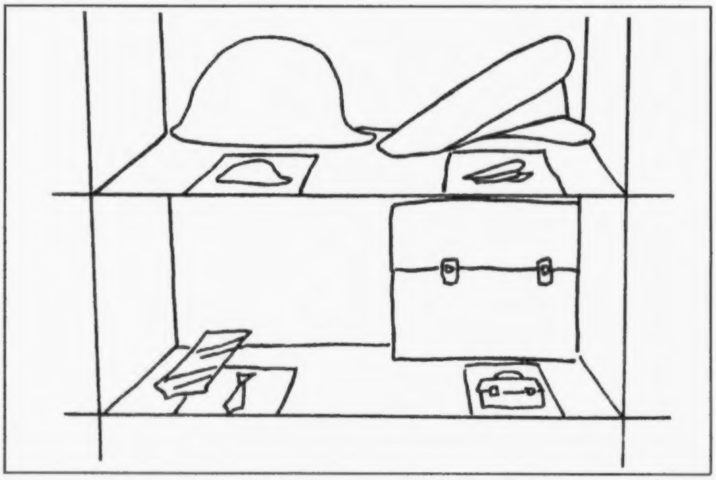
If items are stored in cabinets or bins, there should be labels of each item on the outside cabinet door or on the side of the storage bin. This will alert children to what props are housed in these storage areas.



Similarly, if clothes and hats are hung on hooks or coat racks, labels or photos of each item to be stored should be displayed at the children's eye level.



Orderly storage and an orderly room arrangement go hand in hand in creating an environment that facilitates children's dramatic play. The next section discusses the teacher's role once the house corner has been designed. It presents various strategies for interacting with children in this important interest area.



IV. Interacting with Children in the House Corner: The Teacher's Role

As Section III discusses, the first thing teachers can do to support children's dramatic play is to create an orderly environment that is rich in props and materials. The next step is for teachers, through the process of observation, to assess what children are doing so that they can enhance and extend children's dramatic play.

Observing Children's Dramatic Play

To facilitate children's growth and development, teachers must first know what it is that children are doing. It makes little sense to plan strategies for enhancing children's learning without first becoming familiar with what children know and don't know, and what they can and can't do. The best and most widely accepted technique for gathering such information is the use of systematic observation.

Observing children entails careful study of what each child does and says while engaged in the house corner. Teachers should plan to spend a set amount of time (10 to 15 minutes daily) observing each child over a period of several days. Note-taking is encouraged to further ensure that observations will be recalled.

What should teachers look for? Sara Smilansky, an Israeli psychologist who has conducted extensive research in dramatic play, suggests that six areas be observed:

1. role-playing behaviors,
2. use of props,
3. use of make-believe,
4. time spent in dramatic play,
5. interactions with other children, and
6. verbal communication.

In observing each of these aspects of play, teachers should look for answers to the questions that follow.

Role Playing

- What role(s) does the child play?
- What type of role is this (family member, animal, monster, self, etc.)?
- Does the child select the same role day after day or experiment with different roles?

- How many different aspects of the role does the child play?

Use of Props

- Does the child use props?
- Which props does the child use? Clothes? Hats? Tools? Dolls? Furniture?
- How does the child use the props? Is the child interested in the prop and what it can do, or does the prop merely serve as set decoration?
- How many different props does the child use?
- Does the child think of creative uses for props, such as using a string of beads to represent spaghetti and meatballs?

Use of Make-Believe

- Does the child's play include fantasy?
- Are the elements of fantasy used by the child simple or complex in structure?
- Do the child's ideas for make-believe come from stories, TV, or the child's own imagination?

Use of Time

- How much time does the child spend involved in a dramatic play episode?
- How much of the child's time is spent in group play?
- Which play themes hold the child's attention longest?
- How persistent is the child in carrying out the role selected?

Interaction

- Does the child play alone? With one other child? As part of a group?
- Who initiates group play? Is it always the same child who assigns roles and gets things started?
- How does the child let other children know of his or her interest in group play?
- How does the child resolve problems in sharing props, selecting roles, and giving directions?

Verbal Communication

- What does the child say during play?
- Does the child use language to communicate ideas? Give directions? Explain things? Ask for information? Request props?
- Does the child's voice sound different from normal when he or she is taking on a role?

By observing these aspects of dramatic play, teachers should be able to compile a profile of each child's developmental level in terms of dramatic play.

The chart that begins on the next page outlines the progression of dramatic play skills.

LEVELS OF ABILITY IN SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY

CRITERIA	BEGINNING LEVEL	ADVANCED LEVEL
(1) Role play (a) Role Chosen	Role relates to child's attempts to understand the familiar world (e.g., mommy, daddy, baby, animals)	Roles relate to child's attempts to understand and sort out the world (e.g., firefighter, police officer, doctor)
(b) How child plays role	Child imitates one or two aspects of role (e.g., child announces "I'm the mommy," rocks the baby, and then leaves the house corner)	Child expands concept of role (e.g., child announces "I'm the mommy," feeds the baby, goes to a meeting, prepares dinner, reads the newspaper, goes to work, talks on the phone, etc.)
(2) Using Props (a) Type of prop needed	Child uses real object or replica of object (e.g., real or toy phone)	Child uses any object as prop (e.g., block for phone) or a pretend prop (e.g., holds hands to ear and pretends to telephone)
(b) How child uses prop	Manipulative--child enjoys physically playing with objects (e.g., banging receiver of phone, dialing)	Prop is used as part of play episode (e.g., child calls a doctor on phone because baby is sick)
(3) Make-Believe	Child imitates simple actions of adults (e.g., child moves iron back and forth on ironing board, holds phone receiver to ear)	Child's actions are part of a whole play episode of make-believe (e.g., "I'm ironing this dress now so I can wear it for the party tonight")
(4) Time	Fleeting involvement (e.g., child enters area, plays with doll, puts on hat, and leaves area)	Child stays in area more than 10 minutes (e.g., child is really involved in play episode and carries through on theme)

LEVELS OF ABILITY IN SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY(continued)

CRITERIA	BEGINNING LEVEL		ADVANCED LEVEL
(5) Interaction	Solitary play (e.g., child acts out role alone with no apparent awareness of others)	Functional cooperation (e.g., child interacts with others at various times when the need arises to share props or have a partner in play)	Cooperative effort (e.g., child acts out role cooperatively with others, recognizing the benefits of working together)
(6) Verbal Communication	Verbalization centers around use of toys (e.g., "Bring me that phone," "I had the carriage first")	Dialogue about play theme--constant chatter about roles children are playing (e.g., restaurant scene: "What do you want to eat?" "Do you have hamburgers?" "Yup. We have hamburgers, french fries, and cokes")	

Extending and Enriching Children's Dramatic Play

Knowing individual children's developmental levels enables teachers to respond appropriately to each child's needs. Do children need to be introduced to more props? Should they be encouraged to move to the next developmental stage? Are children getting stuck in their choice of dramatic roles?

To answer these questions, teachers need to be continually sensitive to what is happening in the house corner. From observational data, the teacher should be able to decide if a child is still finding enrichment at a particular developmental stage or if that child is in need of the teacher's assistance to progress further. Teachers must constantly be assessing when it is appropriate to let children be and when it is to their advantage for the teacher to intervene.

As used in the *Creative Curriculum*, intervention refers to strategies teachers can use to facilitate learning. Some modes of intervention are discussed next.

The Teacher as a Stimulator of Play

Many teachers do not wish to take an active role in the dramatic play activities occurring in the house corner. Yet some children need this type of support and encouragement. In these situations the most appropriate tactic would be for teachers to enter the house corner as an interested adult--not as a participant.

What follows are two examples of how a teacher might accomplish this type of intervention.

> **Example 1**. A teacher sees a child pushing a doll in the carriage and asks,"Where are you taking your baby?" If the child replies "to the store" or "to the doctor," the teacher might continue,"What are you going to buy?" or "What is wrong with your baby?"
>
> **Example 2**. A child is standing by the stove and the teacher asks, "What are you cooking?" or "I'd love to have some lunch." Then the teacher asks, "What kinds of things do you like to eat?" Then, to the other children, the teacher says, "Is anyone else here hungry for some lunch?"

The actual conversations, of course, would depend on the child's answers. The goal is to ask questions that are open-ended and require more than a "yes" or "no" response. This will engage the child in conversation and at the same time extend the dramatic play.

Teachers can also involve other children, when appropriate. In some cases the teacher may want to encourage two specific children to play together, as in this example:

> One child is holding a doll. The other is by the stove. The teacher might say, "How is your baby today? Is she hungry?" or "Shall we ask Robbie if he can make some food so you can feed your baby?"

By taking an active role in the house corner, teachers foster children's developmental progress in a variety of ways. An active role encourages children's language development by building vocabulary and making concepts more meaningful because they are introduced in context.

> Using a rolling pin on the table, a child says, "I'm baking a cake." The teacher might say, lifting the sifter, "Do you need to sift your flour with this sifter?"
>
> To a child using measuring spoons to bake a cake, the teacher might say, "That is the largest spoon and that is the smallest. Are you putting a lot or a little in your cake?"

An active role also focuses children's attention on particular aspects of a situation.

> A child is putting the baby to bed and pretends the baby is crying. The child says, "Now, baby, you go to bed!" The teacher might say, "Do you know a song the baby might like to hear? Sometimes a lullaby helps babies go to sleep."

Finally, an active role expands children's knowledge of different people's work roles.

> A child is playing shoe salesperson. She measures another child's foot and says, "Here are your new shoes." The teacher asks, "Do you have a shoe box for those shoes or a bag to carry them in?"

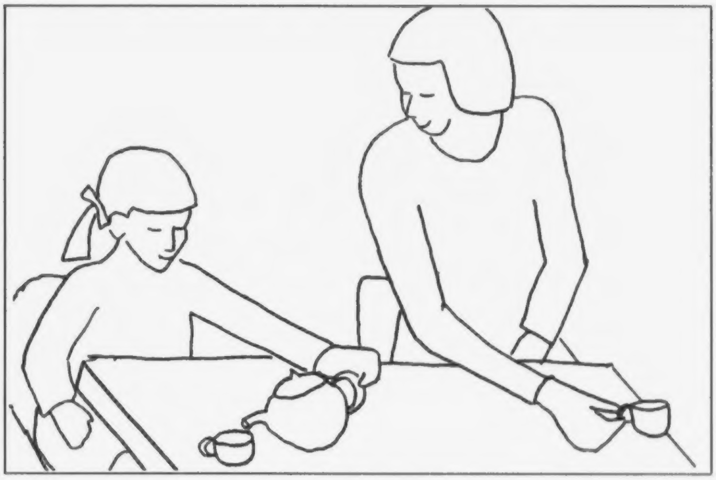
For children at more advanced levels of dramatic play, a teacher might help the group extend the role-playing situation longer, make the theme more complex, or include more actions for the role being played.

A group of three children are playing restaurant. Two are sitting at the table eating, and one is serving the food. The teacher sees that the episode is ending and the children are losing interest. She might say, "Does anyone here want to order dessert? Waiter, what kind of desserts do you have?"

A child is dressing up very carefully with a skirt, shoes, hat and handbag. The child admires herself in the mirror, turns around twice, and starts to take off the hat. The teacher might say, "You are all dressed up. Who are you?" or "Where are you going today?" or "Here is a pocketbook. Don't forget your money."

The Teacher as a Participant in Play

Teachers may find that there are times when it is necessary to take a more active role in children's play. This is usually the case when children need to be shown particular techniques or skills.



One effective way for teachers to take an active role but still remain relatively unobstrusive is for teachers to sit at a table in the house corner and pretend to be chatting on the telephone to a friend or colleague. This gives the teacher an opportunity to comment on the children's behavior in a nonthreatening way. For example, pretending to talk to a friend on the phone, the teacher might say, "Yes, we're pretty busy here. Raymond is cooking and Susie is getting ready to go to the store. Hey, Raymond, Minnie wants to know what you are cooking."

Before the teacher entered the scene, Raymond's actions at the stove may not have been purposeful. However, by describing what he was doing and asking a question, the teacher helped him focus on his actions and made him think in order to answer her question.

Teachers can also encourage children to purposefully use props as part of a play episode. For example, to a girl holding a doll, the teacher might say, "Oh, is your baby sick?" or "Did you call the doctor? Here, let's get the doctor on the phone." By involving "the doctor," the teacher in the above example encouraged the child to be a concerned "parent" and to treat the prop--the doll--as a central part of her play.

Teachers can also use props to help children learn more about real-life interactions. For instance, by referring to dolls in the house corner as "babies," teachers can help children learn how real babies should be treated, as these examples show:

- "Take the baby off the table, otherwise he might fall and hurt himself."

- "Be careful feeding the baby--be sure she doesn't choke."

- "Would you put the baby to bed? Be sure to put the cover on so she won't catch cold."

By assuming the children aren't just children holding dolls but are role-playing parents with babies, the teacher is thus extending the children's activities into socio-dramatic roles.

Another instance in which teachers may find it helpful to intervene is when a child wanders away from the house corner. An appropriate response from the teacher might be to inquire of the group, "Where's David going?" Hearing this question, the child is likely to realize he is missed and will want to be included in the action at the house corner. If this child does return to the group, the teacher should ask him questions about the role he is to play, to ensure that he does indeed feel included.

Whenever teachers do intervene in dramatic play, they should consider several cautionary guidelines.

- Teachers should avoid asking children questions with obvious answers, such as "what color is your shirt?" Rather, they should ask open-ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer and encourage the child to think. If a child says, "Oh, no, my car is out of gas!" the teacher could respond by saying, "Your car is out of gas? How will you get to work?"

- Children's dramatic play often reflects real-life events. Teachers should therefore avoid making judgments about the events portrayed. Suppose that three children are playing house and eating dinner. The "baby" is whining and the "mother" hits the child and says, "No more food for you, go to bed!" Instead of criticizing the "mother" for this behavior, the teacher might more appropriately ask, "Is there any other way we could get this baby to stop whining?"

- Teachers should avoid dominating the conversation and/or controlling the dramatic play. The house corner is first and foremost a place for children to play and interact. Although the teacher should be a facilitator of these activities, he or she should be wary of intervening to the point of "running the show."

Introducing New Themes in the House Corner

In addition to undertaking the interventions just noted, one of the primary roles of the teacher should be to introduce new themes. As stressed throughout this module, the effective house corner will offer children an array of dramatic experiences that go beyond that of "playing house." When should teachers introduce new themes?--certainly if children seem bored or tired of playing house and seem to have trouble continuing their play. Even if children don't seem stuck, it may be helpful for teachers to introduce new themes periodically, so as to spur children's imagination and facilitate learning.

One way for teachers to do this is to take cues from other activities or seasonal events and tie them in with dramatic play. For instance, a field trip to the post office or the fire station provides an ideal stimulus for children to re-enact their visits through dramatic play. Similarly, if a peer is moving away, children might wish to take on the role of movers and actually role-play a move to a new town.

Some teachers may prefer to implement a planned sequence of themes in the house corner. For instance, a teacher may wish to begin the year with family play and gradually move on to dramatic play related to community places, such as the supermarket, gas station, or library. Thus, the planned sequence of dramatic activities would reflect actual places in the community that children have visited.

If teachers are using prop boxes to introduce themes, they may wonder how best to do this. Should children be exposed to all the props at once or should they be given only a few props at a time? Actually, teachers have used both methods successfully by following these procedures:

- Select one item from the box most likely to stimulate the theme, such as a firefighter's hat, a stethoscope, or a cash register. Put the item in the house corner before the children arrive and see what the children do with the new prop. Add more props as the children request them or if the children demonstate a real interest in the new theme.

- Place the entire prop box in the house corner before the children arrive. Leave it open. Without talking to the group about the box, watch what the children say and do and how they use the materials. Add new materials as the children request them or need them.

No matter how themes are introduced, the important point is that teachers use props to help extend children's dramatic play. By doing so, teachers can help children gain the following:

- knowledge of roles outside the family;
- understanding of what their parents do at work;
- understanding of the world around them and, in particular, of the community they live in;
- opportunities to learn new vocabulary and verbalize discoveries; and
- opportunities to play cooperatively.

This section has presented strategies that teachers can use to enhance children's dramatic play in the house corner. The section that follows provides information on how teachers can work together with parents to support children's continued growth.

V. Supporting Children's Dramatic Play: The Parent's Role

Teaming with Parents

A guiding principle of the *Creative Curriculum* is that children benefit most when teachers and parents work together to support children's growth and development. Play is the child's work. Conveying to parents the value of play and the important role of dramatic play in a child's growth and development is central to helping them understand the *Creative Curriculum.*

How can teachers help parents understand that dramatic play is an important means of facilitating children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth? One direct way is through a newsletter. Using the information presented in this module (in particular, Sections I and II), teachers can transmit information to parents in a nonthreatening way. Parents are thus free to mull over the information at their leisure.

Another means of transmitting information is through parent-teacher conferences. In this format, parents and teachers discuss the topic one on one. Using the stages of dramatic play as a starting point, teachers can share their observations of each child's developmental progress. Parents can question teachers directly and ask them to address their concerns.

Another highly successful technique is to hold a parent workshop on the role of dramatic play in early childhood education. A workshop is particularly useful because it enables parents to see firsthand the role of dramatic play and imagination in learning. In planning a workshop of this nature, teachers may wish to follow this procedure:

- Encourage parents to visit the classroom during the week prior to the workshop to observe children at play in the house corner.
- Give parents an observation form to use while they are observing the children's dramatic play. Encourage them to observe one child in the house corner and to complete the form.
- At the workshop, show a film (such as the videotape on the *Creative Curriculum*) that visually demonstrates the value of dramatic play. (See Appendix B for information on audiovisual resources.)
- Share with parents the types of themes children enact in the house corner and how play is enriched and extended.
- Show parents the prop boxes that are available and how they are used.
- Conduct a follow-up discussion of the importance of dramatic play.

Some teachers also find it helpful to have an outside expert attend the parent workshop and talk with parents about the role and importance of play. The selected person may be the director of another early childhood program, someone from a local community college or university, or a parent in the education field. By adding "expert" opinion to the discussion, some teachers find that parents more readily accept the information presented.

Encouraging Dramatic Play at Home

Once parents recognize that dramatic play is an important part of their child's educational experience, teachers can work with parents to support this activity in children's homes. The following are suggestions that teachers can give parents for helping children engage in dramatic play at home.

- Provide the child with space for dramatic play, such as a corner of a bedroom, kitchen, or living room that includes a table, chair, and homemade doll bed.
- Save dress-up clothes, especially hats, costume jewelry, ties, and purses, for the children to use.
- Store dress-up clothes in a sturdy cardboard box or put plastic hooks on the wall or the back of a piece of furniture.
- Save large cardboard boxes, such as those from new appliances, for the children to use in making a "house."
- Encourage children to play make-believe by asking them open-ended, nonjudgmental questions, such as:

  "Where are you and the baby going today?"

  "Would you like to cook some food for your baby?"

  "There's someone on the phone who wants to talk to you."
- Play "what if" games with children to stimulate their imagination and creative thinking skills:

  "What would happen if the bus ran out of gas?"

  "How can we get this baby to eat her vegetables?"

  "How will the firefighter help those people?"

  "What are we going to do about the sick baby?"

Teachers can also include parents in preschool activities by requesting that parents donate props and old clothing for use in the house corner. Parents might be invited to work with teachers in assembling prop boxes at parent meetings.

Obtaining parental support for dramatic play may initially be a challenge for teachers--but it is a challenge with a high rate of return. When parents encourage imaginative play at home, children progress to higher levels of socio-dramatic play and their learning is increased. When teachers and parents join forces, the child is enriched.

VI. For Further Reading on the House Corner

Curry, Nancy E., and Sara Arnaud (eds.). *Play: The Child Strives Toward Self-Realization*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1971.

Hartley, Ruth, Lawrence Frank, and Robert Golderson. *Understanding Children's Play*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.

McKee, Judy (ed.). *Play: Working Partner of Growth*. Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1986.

Pulaski, Mary Ann. *Understanding Piaget*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Read, Katherine. *The Nursery School, Human Relationships and Learning*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1976

Smilansky, Sara. *The Effects of Sociodramatic Play on Disadvantaged Preschool Children*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968.

Smilansky, Sara. "Can Adults Facilitate Play in Children? Theoretical and Practical Considerations," in Curry and Arnaud (eds.) *Play: The Child Strives Toward Self-Realization*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1971.

Table Toys

I. Introduction to Table Toys: Philosophy and Theory 151

- What Are Table Toys and Why Are They Important? 151
- Developmental Stages in the Use of Table Toys 153

II. Children at Play in the Table Toy Area: Goals and Objectives 154

- Goals for Children in the Table Toy Area 154
- Learning Objectives for the Use of Table Toys 155

III. Setting Up the Table Toy Area: Planning the Environment 157

- Room Arrangement Considerations 157
- Selecting Materials for the Table Toy Area 158
- Displaying Table Toys 168
- Caring for Table Toys 169

IV. Interacting with Children in the Table Toy Area: The Teacher's Role 171

- Observing Children's Use of Table Toys 171
- Reacting to Children in the Table Toy Area 172
- Reinforcing What Children Do in the Table Toy Area 173
- Extending and Enriching Children's Play with Table Toys 174

V. Supporting Children's Table Toy Play: The Parent's Role 182

- Involving Parents in Using Table Toys 182
- Encouraging Table Toy Play at Home 182

VI. For Further Reading on Table Toys 185

I. Introduction to Table Toys: Philosophy and Theory

What Are Table Toys and Why Are They Important?

Table toys, as their name implies, include games, manipulatives, puzzles, and collectibles that children commonly play with at a table. Yet despite their name, these materials can just as easily be played with on the floor by a child alone, a child working with a teacher, or small groups of children.

More important than where they are used is how these toys are used. In the *Creative Curriculum*, table toys are generally grouped into three functional categories: self-correcting, structured toys; open-ended toys; and collectibles.

Self-correcting toys are those which fit together in a specific way--for example, a puzzle. A child using this type of toy can readily determine if the toy has been put together correctly. Self-correcting toys include the following:

- puzzles: wooden, rubber insets, and durable cardboard;
- variations on puzzles in which the child places an object into a specific place--for instance, cylinders into holes;
- self-help skill frames (buttoning, zipping, tying);
- lotto games;
- nesting boxes; and
- parquetry or pattern blocks.

Open-ended toys function in the opposite way from self-correcting toys: they have no right or wrong solution. These toys can be put together in a variety of ways, depending entirely on the child's creativity. Open-ended toys include the following:

- sewing cards with yarn;
- nesting boxes;
- felt boards;
- table blocks, including Legos, small sets of unit blocks, castle blocks, and colored cubes;
- beads and yarn for stringing;
- pegs and pegboards;

- attribute blocks (three-dimensional-shape blocks);
- dramatic play props, including doll furniture, small family sets, and animals;
- manipulatives: any put-together toy;
- equipment for weighing and measuring; and
- Cuisenaire Rods.

Collectibles are like open-ended toys in that they can be put together in a variety of unspecified ways. They differ from open-ended toys, however, in that they are composed of sets of like objects. Attractive collections encourage children to sort, match, and compare. They can be used in many creative ways. Examples of collectibles include the following:

- plastic bottle caps;
- buttons;
- keys;
- seashells;
- seeds;
- different colored plastic coffee scoops;
- rocks;
- plastic fasteners (from bread); and
- baby-food jar tops.

It should be noted that these categories do not always hold fast. Some table toys can be used in different ways and fall in various categories depending on their function at a particular time. To illustrate, parquetry blocks could be considered a structured toy when being used to duplicate a specific pattern. However, they can also be used by children to create new patterns; in this instance, their function is open ended.

Table toys are an important part of the preschool classroom. Most children enjoy playing quietly with them both during free play and as part of directed learning activities. The great variety of table toys makes playing with them a rich and challenging experience. The fact that most children find playing with table toys inherently enjoyable is an added benefit. These toys are one of the most valuable teaching tools at the preschool teacher's disposal.

Table toys offer children a rich means for working on physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills. For example, by completing a puzzle, children can practice eye-hand coordination, learn how to match objects, and experience the satisfaction of successfully completing a task. Table toys thus provide a context in which learning is both satisfying and ongoing.

Developmental Stages in the Use of Table Toys

As we have seen in earlier modules, children approach all learning developmentally. Learning occurs in increments. Depending on the child's previous experience with table toys and the child's physical capabilities, he or she will move from tentative, simple types of play to more complex, integrated modes of play. With regard to table toys, children move through two distinct stages of play: exploration and experimentation.

During the first stage of exploration, children use all their senses to become familiar with a toy. They look at it. They feel it. They explore its physical properties, such as its size, its weight, and its shape. They notice its colors and textures. The goal of this stage is for children to investigate all the properties of the toy.

The experimentation stage involves actual use of the object. During this stage, children creatively test the toy to see how it works. If the toy is structured, they attempt to put it together as intended. If the toy is unstructured, their attempts and approaches vary. For the child, the goal is to learn as much about the toy as possible. How does it work? What can be done with it? Can it be put together? Can it be used to build? Can pieces be matched?

By exposing children to increasingly more complex table toys, teachers can help children progress. At the start of the year, a child may work on a simple puzzle, learning matching skills. Later, this same child can apply the learned matching skills to a game of lotto and eventually to sorting buttons according to more than one attribute (e.g., red with two holes). The matching skills of the child expand developmentally through the use of increasingly more complex table toys.

This section has presented the theoretical basis for including table toys in the classroom. The next section highlights the goals and objectives for actual classroom use of table toys.

II. Children at Play in the Table Toy Area: Goals and Objectives

Goals for Children in the Table Toy Area

Many teachers consider the table toy area the most versatile in the classroom. The wide variety of available table toys enables teachers to facilitate children's growth in any number of areas. In terms of their cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development, children can reach numerous learning goals through the use of table toys. In selecting goals appropriate for children's needs, teachers should consider the following lists.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To enhance creativity.
- To learn concepts of color, size, and shape.
- To classify and sequence objects in logical ways.
- To learn number concepts.
- To develop matching and pairing skills.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To gain experience in working with small groups.
- To learn to work cooperatively with others.
- To develop self-discipline.
- To stick with a task to completion.
- To be willing to take risks.
- To develop self-esteem.

Goals for Physical Development

- To strengthen fine motor control.
- To enhance eye-hand coordination.
- To refine visual discrimination.
- To establish reading readiness skills.

Learning Objectives for the Use of Table Toys

For each of the goal areas just outlined, there are a number of specific activities that teachers can introduce to facilitate learning. The precise objectives that teachers set should, of course, reflect the backgrounds, interests, and capabilities of the children in their care. For instance, a teacher might concentrate on setting objectives related to learning seriation for those children who enjoy building towers out of blocks but don't yet understand why sequencing and size affect a building's stability. Similarly, a teacher might concentrate on setting objectives related to self-confidence if certain children seem unsure of themselves and tentative in their approach to using table toys. In general, teachers should customize their objectives to meet the current learning needs of the children in their care.

To assist teachers in specifying learning objectives for children using table toys, the following are suggested as a starting point.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To demonstrate creative abilities through experimentation with open-ended toys.
- To sort and match objects such as buttons, shells, or bottle caps on the basis of attributes such as color, size, texture, and shape.
- To demonstrate an understanding of number concepts related to sequencing, seriation, and classification through interaction with table blocks, parquetry, and attribute blocks.
- To develop reading readiness skills by using such table toys as pegboards, dominoes, and collectibles to show directionality and figure-ground discrimination and to match like objects.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To work cooperatively in small groups by playing with table toys such as lotto, dominoes, and memory and matching games.
- To share table toys and wait for a turn with a desired toy.
- To demonstrate perseverance and self-discipline by working with a structured table toy until it has been mastered.
- To identify ways to put together open-ended table toys.
- To experience pride in accomplishments by seeing a task through from start to finish.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To demonstrate fine motor control through such activities as placing pegs in holes, stringing beads, piecing together puzzles, and manipulating buttons, marbles, or shells.
- To demonstrate skill in eye-hand coordination by sewing with yarn, sorting buttons, and returning puzzle pieces to their frames.
- To demonstrate visual discrimination skills by sorting objects according to attributes of size, color, and shape.
- To refine the sense of touch by learning to distinguish toys made of different materials.

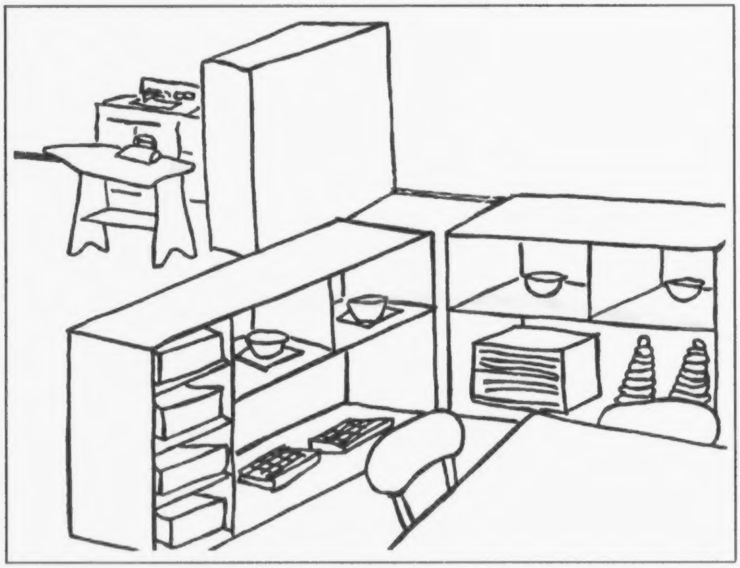
These objectives are intended as a master list from which teachers can select those which best suit the individual needs of the children in their care. The following section presents the environmental context in which these objectives can be achieved.

III. Setting Up the Table Toy Area: Planning the Environment

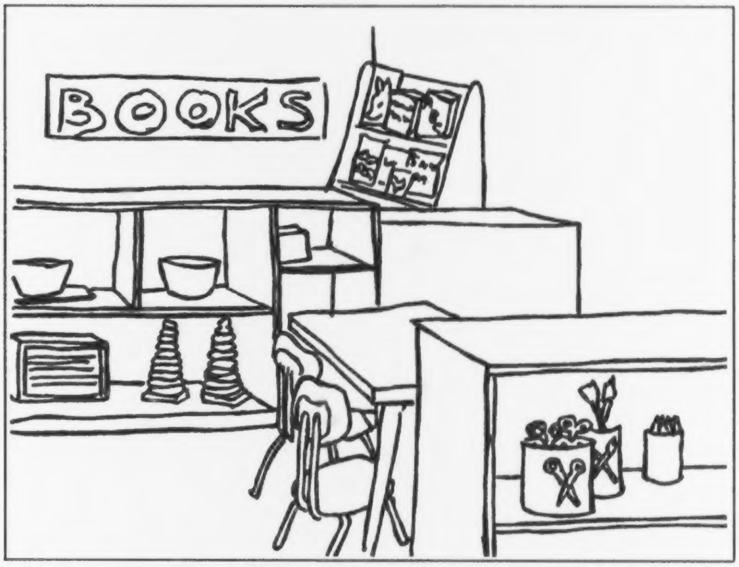
The goals and objectives outlined in the preceding section can best be met when the classroom is arranged to facilitate learning. The location of the table toy area and the display of the toys in this area both have an effect on how children use, learn from, and take care of these materials.

Room Arrangement Considerations

In setting up a classroom area for table toys, it is important to create an environment in which children can concentrate on the toys with as few outside distractions as possible. The diagram below illustrates such an arrangement.



As shown, the table toy area is ideally enclosed on three sides by using an L-shaped shelf to create boundaries. When the area is defined, children can work with table toys with little distraction from other classroom activities.



In the table toy area illustrated above, the toys are stored on shelves near the tables. This not only makes the materials readily accessible to the children but also facilitates clean-up.

The illustrated table toy area also shows another key design feature: there is ample, unobstructed floor space where children can play with the toys on the floor, should they wish to. Many children prefer sitting on the floor when using table toys.

If space or furniture is at a premium, teachers can use rug scraps or tape to define individual floor spaces where children can play with the toys. More important than the furnishings is that the area be enclosed and the space defined. To further aid children's concentration, the table toy area should be located next to other quiet areas such as the library or art areas.

Selecting Materials for the Table Toy Area

There is a wide variety of toys available for use in the table toy area. Trying to distinguish between the literally hundreds of available toys can seem an overwhelming task. In selecting appropriate materials, teachers might consider the following guidelines:

- Toys should represent all categories of function: structured, open-ended, and collectible.
- Selected toys should be made of varying materials (e.g., heavy plastic, rubber, wood, etc.) providing children with an opportunity to experience different kinds of tactile sensations.
- Selected toys should be brightly colored and in good repair.

- When possible, the same materials should be made available in varying levels of difficulty so that as children complete one toy, the next level of difficulty is available. To illustrate, stringing beads can be made available in both large and small sizes so that once the large beads are mastered, children can attempt stringing smaller beads. Similarly, increasingly complex puzzles should be on hand so that a child who has mastered a five-piece puzzle can move on to a seven-piece puzzle.

In the *Creative Curriculum* the table toy area includes an assortment of toys that facilitate children's growth and development. These toys can be categorized according to what children are likely to do with the toy.

- **Puzzles**. This traditional staple of the table toy area includes wood inserts, rubber inserts, and large-pieced cardboard puzzles. Also included in this category are structured materials such as cylinders that fit into holes and spools that fit on poles. Puzzles are important in that they provide children with an opportunity to work on physical and intellectual skills at the same time.

- **Cooperative games.** The type of toy included in this category is one that depends on matching. Children are encouraged to match pictures, numbers, symbols, and objects--not to win or lose. Games included in this category include lotto, dominoes, and memory and matching games. Cooperative games provide children with the opportunity to improve their powers of discrimination while developing social skills.

- **Building toys.** Table blocks and Legos are popular toys in the table toy area. They can be used for stacking, building, and constructing intricate structures. Building toys provide children with an opportunity to develop fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, and social skills. They are especially helpful in teaching basic math concepts.

- **Sorting and categorizing games.** Button boxes and other sets of collectibles are used in the table toy area for sorting and categorizing by attributes of size, shape, color, and so on. Sorting games enable children to think up their own ideas for classifying objects and to be creative.

- **Patterning toys.** Pegboards, cube blocks, stringing beads, and parquetry blocks can all be used to copy or create designs. These materials promote fine motor skills and develop powers of observation and directionality.

- **Manipulative toys.** Manipulative toys are characteristically three-dimensional in design. They can be picked up and held in the hand, and they offer considerable variety, ranging from flat puzzles to board games. Chief among the manipulatives are patterning toys such as stringing beads and pegboards. Manipulative table toys are chiefly used in helping children refine their small motor skills and develop improved eye-hand coordination.

- **Toys for dramatic play.** Included in this category are toys that can be used creatively by children in performing dramatic play scenarios. Typical toys include Legos for use in building prop settings, dollhouse furniture, and collectibles such as marbles and shells that can be used to represent a variety of imaginary objects. Toys for dramatic play enhance children's imaginative powers.

At this point in the selection process, it may be helpful for teachers to create a master "wish list" of toys they would like to include in the table toy area. The list on the following page is a sample inventory for the table toy area. This list is meant to be a useful basis for teachers to use in preparing their own lists. Teachers will of course want to tailor their lists to meet the individual developmental needs and interests of the children in their classrooms.

SAMPLE INVENTORY FOR TABLE TOY AREA

Type of Toy	Number on Hand	Additional Number Needed
Puzzles		
Wooden		
Rubber insets		
Cardboard		
Lotto games		
Dominoes (picture and number)		
Nesting boxes		
Parquetry or pattern blocks		
Sewing cards with yarn		
Games		
Pegs and pegboards		
Table blocks		
Beads and yarn for stringing		
Attribute blocks		
Dramatic play props		
Manipulatives/interlocking toys		
Cuisenaire Rods		
Colored inch cubes		
Collectibles (e.g., buttons, bottle caps)		
Skill frames (buttoning, zipping, typing)		

In making the transition from the "wish list" to an actual classroom inventory, teachers need to be alert consumers. Some suggested considerations for purchasing materials follow.

- **Safety.** All toys should be safe to use and in accordance with standards outlined by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. There should be no sharp points or edges, no pieces small enough to be swallowed, and no pieces that can be used as projectiles.

- **Durability**. Because they are constantly in use, materials in a preschool program need to be more durable than those purchased for home use; for instance, puzzles should be made of wood or rubber. If cardboard puzzles are included, they should be sturdy enough to withstand bending or tearing.

- **Construction.** To be effective, materials ought to perform as indicated on the accompanying manuacturer's directions. Nothing is more frustrating to a child than a toy that doesn't do what it is supposed to. This means that all pieces of a puzzle or interlocking toy should fit together, and all the pieces of a lotto game or domino set should be intact.

- **Flexibility**. Although most self-correcting or structured toys, such as puzzles, are intended for a single purpose, interlocking and manipulative table toys can be used in many ways by children of many ages. The more flexible a toy, the more creatively it can be used and the longer it will hold children's attention. Children tire most quickly of gimmicky toys that have a single purpose and don't require any thinking or creativity.

- **Price.** The cost of a table toy should be balanced against its flexibility. How many different ways can a toy be used? Can children use it in more complex ways as their skills develop? Can it be used in different ways by children of different ages?

Enhancing the Table Toy Area with Homemade Materials

Cost is usually a prime consideration in selecting materials for the table toy area. Most teachers want to have a wide variety of table toys available to children at all times, yet few program budgets provide for this variety. One viable option is to supplement the table toy area with homemade toys and games. Homemade toys are not only cheaper to make but also able to be customized. They can be designed to reinforce specific concepts or topics. A lotto game, for example, can be used to illustrate objects seen on a trip. By making toys themselves, teachers can design materials that will truly facilitate the learning objectives they have targeted for children.

To assist teachers in constructing their own table toys, the *Creative Curriculum* provides several design plans. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose from the following ideas for homemade toys that will best enhance their classroom inventories.

Flip Books

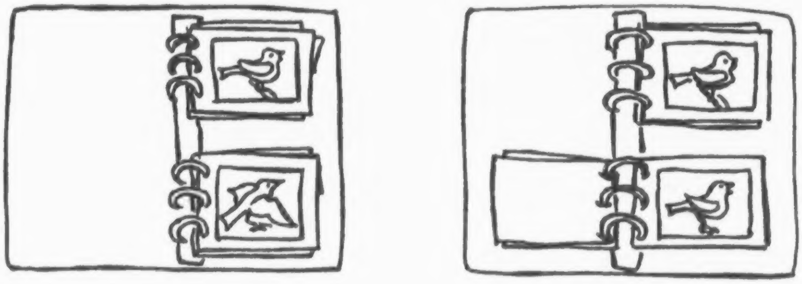
Matching games can easily be made using inexpensive ring binders that can be purchased from five-and-dime stores or stationery stores. The 7" x 4" binder with six rings is suggested.

To convert the binders into matching games, teachers can cut cardboard or posterboard into cards that will fit into the books. Two copies of cards should be made: one to fit in the binder and one to be kept in a deck. An identical card or picture should be pasted on each pair of cards and then laminated or covered with clear adhesive-backed paper. The set of cards to be contained in the notebook should be punched to fit in the binder.

As designed, a matching game can easily be played: a child chooses a picture to be matched from the set of cards and flips through the pictures until the matching picture appears. Four pictures might be a good number for very young children. A book for older children might have as many as 10 choices. Having all the pictures relate to a theme (birds, transportation, numbers, houses, letters, people, flowers) makes the activity a more meaningful learning experience for children.

Some examples:

- Birds (a simple game)

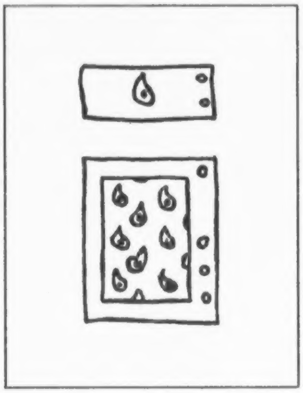


Binder open to first cards

Binder open to matching cards

- Patterns (a more difficult game)

This example uses one set of large cards (four holes) and one set of smaller cards (two holes). Each large card is covered with a different pattern. Each small card shows just a part of the corresponding large card pattern. This "part-to-whole" matching is an advanced perception game. The binder keeps all the cards together and is a durable container for storing the cards.



Puzzles

Puzzles can readily be constructed by teachers using either photographs or pictures. Family photos are one popular, personalized choice of subjects. Magazine pictures that illustrate classroom themes are another favorite choice.

To make a puzzle, teachers should mount the selected photo or picture on cardboard and cut into sections. The pieces should then be dry-mounted and laminated or covered with clear adhesive-backed paper for protection.

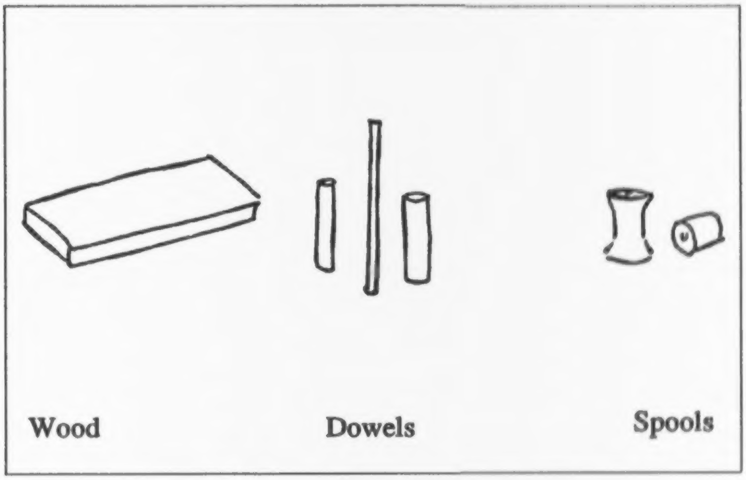
Matching puzzles can be made using two copies of the same photograph or picture. One copy is mounted intact and the other picture cut into pieces as just described.

Spool Boards

Several interesting toys can be made from scrap wood, empty thread spools, and wooden dowels. Often parents, tailors, or lumber yards will donate these materials. If none are available, they can be inexpensively purchased.

To make a spool board, teachers should start with a thick block of wood, a selected number of spools, and dowels of varying length. Holes the width of the dowels should be drilled into the wooden block at points where the dowels are to go. Dowels can then be glued to the board and spools placed on the dowels.

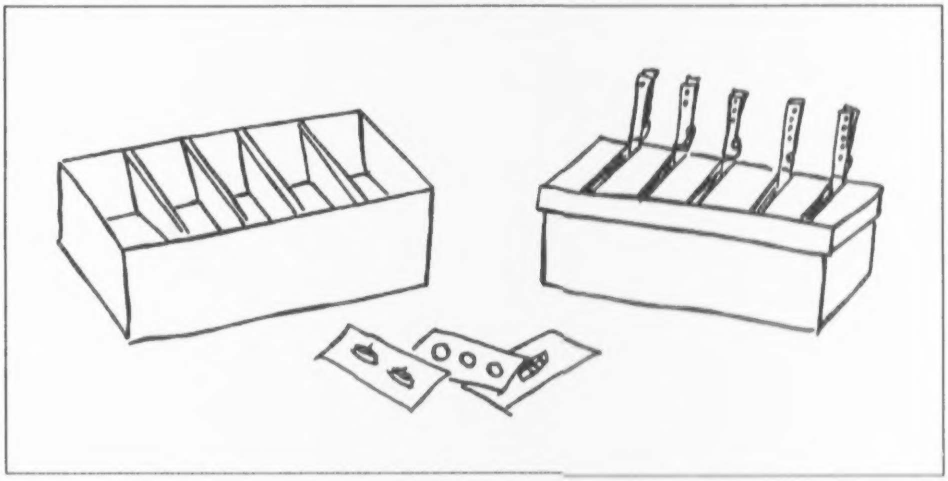
Finished spool boards can be used to teach color matching, grouping, ordering, and counting concepts. One advanced use of the spool board is to teach conservation of number. For this sophisticated table toy, two rows of five dowels are needed: one row that takes small, thin spools and another that takes larger, thicker spools. In each row the child has to build towers one to five spools high. Within the same row, each tower is one spool higher than the one before, but the two "four-spool" towers are not the same height, even though they have the same number of spools on them. This helps teach children that even though one tower looks bigger, the number of spools in each is the same.



Shoe-Box Sorting Game

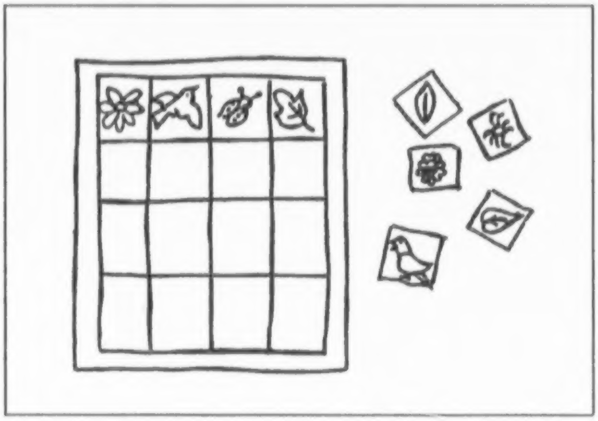
To make a toy for sorting and categorizing, teachers can use the versatile shoe box. Multiple compartments can be made in the box by gluing in cardboard inserts. On the top of the lids, slots should be made to lead to each compartment. The size of the slots should be large enough to allow either bought or homemade picture cards to pass through the slots into the box. Slots should be labeled with either a symbol or a clothespin "flag" that identifies what cards are to go into each particular slot.

In the illustration that follows, there are 25 cards: five cards each of five different pictures, with one to five items on a card.



Variations on this sorting game can be devised by using an open-front box or a grouping board. As with the shoe-box game, an open-front box game can be constructed by taping pieces of cardboard together into as many sections as desired and then placing them in a box. There are two advantages to this box as opposed to the closed shoe box: larger picture cards can be used, and children can see the cards they have already sorted.

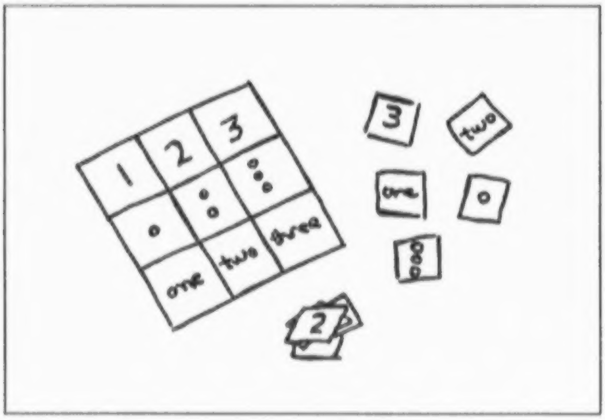
Grouping boards are constructed from large sheets of cardboard or posterboard that are lined horizontally and vertically into a grid. At the top of each column is placed a picture or label identifying what is to be sorted. Cards are then placed in the squares according to their identifying attribute. In the following illustration, gummed stamps have been mounted on cardboard and covered with clear adhesive-backed paper.



Lotto Games

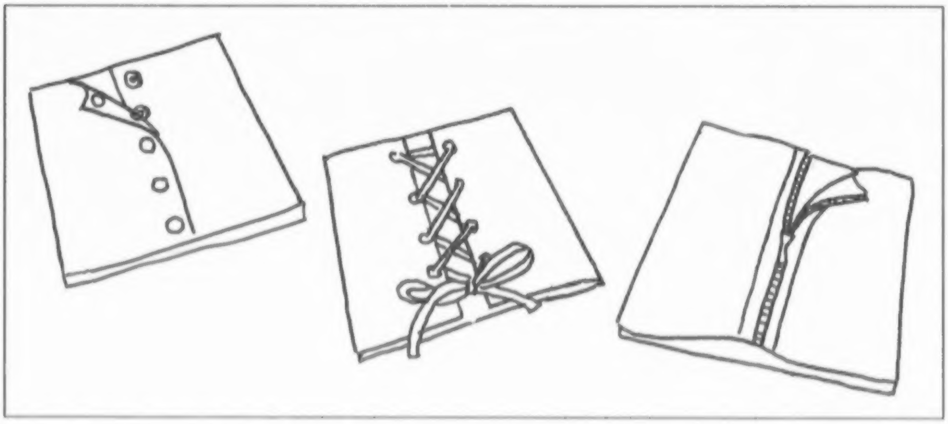
Lotto games can be made from two same-sized pieces of cardboard, such as the backs of writing pads. Using markers, teachers can rule both pieces into as many subsections as desired. One board should then be cut into pieces and the other left intact. One at a time, identical pictures can be pasted onto both cardboard pieces and the sections of the intact board. Once the board and cards are filled with pictures, the cardboard can be laminated or covered with clear adhesive-backed paper.

Possible variations on this basic design are as numerous as the lotto variations that may be purchased. The following illustration is an example of a homemade numbers lotto board.



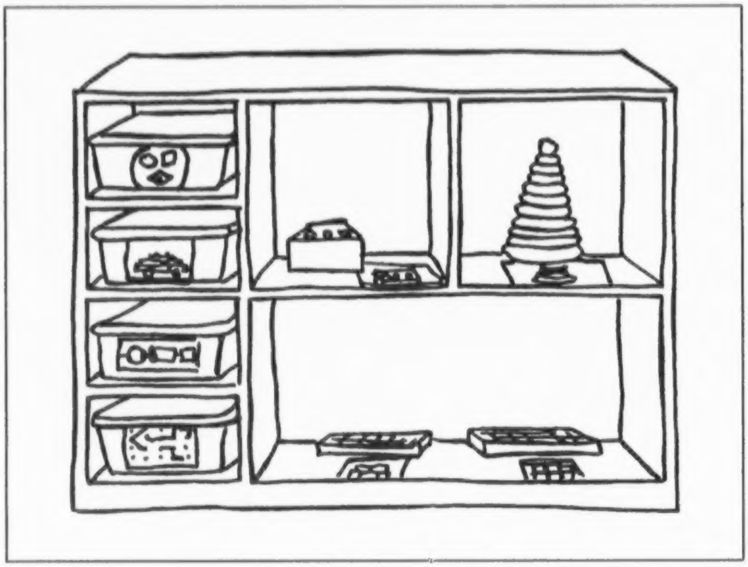
Self-Help Boards

Boards that give children practice in lacing, snapping, and zipping can readily be made by nailing or stapling material to a wooden frame. The teacher can cut the material in the center and add a zipper, button hole, snaps, and so on. Children can then practice fastening the material back together again by using the fastening device(s), as the following illustration shows.



Displaying Table Toys

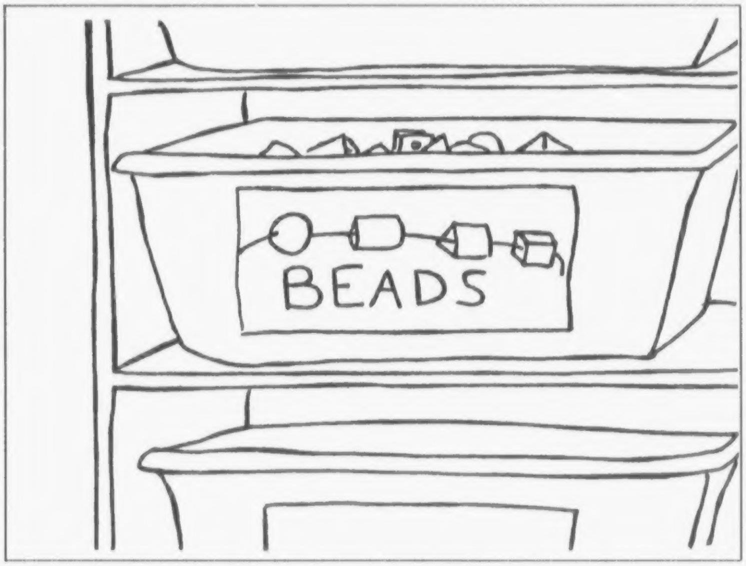
Because of the large number of toys in this interest area, the display and storage of table toys is of great importance. Children will be drawn to the table toy area only if it is attractive and uncluttered. Random piles of toys--no matter how creative or effective--are likely to go unused if children cannot independently select what they want.



Here are some general guidelines for displaying table toys.

- Place toys on shelves at children's eye level so that the children can readily see what materials are available.
- Group toys by type: puzzles in one area, pegboards in another area, and so on.
- Remove from the shelves any broken toys or ones with missing pieces.
- Extra toys (for replenishing the area) should be stored outside the table toy area.
- To maximize storage space, bins or plastic tubs are good for collectibles, Legos, table blocks and other toys with multiple pieces. The boxes that many toys are in are often too flimsy for long term use and are not in a uniform size. This makes it hard to stack them on the shelves.

In addition, teachers can use labels to further enhance the display and storage of table toys. Labels can be made in a variety of ways. Teachers may, for instance, wish to take a photograph of each individual toy or to draw a small picture of the toy on heavy cardboard or poster board. These pictures can then be covered in a protective layer of clear contact paper and attached with masking tape to the shelf areas where the toys are to be stored. If several toys are to be housed in a storage bin, pictures of all the items should be displayed above the height of the bin so that children can see the labels.



For young children, picture labels are preferred. Four- and five-year-olds often enjoy having the name of the toy or game written below the picture as well. In some instances, teachers may try experimenting with written labels without pictures for older children.

Caring for Table Toys

Because of their many pieces and the extent of their use, table toys undergo inevitable wear and tear. Cardboard games such as lotto are particularly prone to wearing out. However, purchased games can be preserved in much the same way as homemade items. Two procedures are recommended for increasing the shelf life of cardboard toys:

- dry-mounting and lamination through the use of a dry-mount machine that can be used at many frame or art supplies stores; and
- covering with transparent adhesive-backed paper (e.g., clear contact paper) that can be bought in most housewares or hardware stores.

Missing puzzle pieces can be replaced by filling in the puzzle to create one less piece than it had originally. Plaster of Paris can be used to fill in the hole where the missing piece would have been placed. This area can then be painted to fit in with the background of the puzzle. Or a new puzzle piece can be made by using a pattern, wood, and a jigsaw for cutting. The new puzzle piece can then be sanded and painted to resemble the lost piece.

Most manipulatives can be washed with soap and water. Wooden pieces should not be allowed to soak and should be dried quickly. An occasional routine cleaning of all the table toys will increase their attractiveness and in some cases help them last longer.

This section has presented strategies for supplying and displaying materials in the table toy area. By selecting diverse and appropriate toys, teachers have at hand a rich resource that facilitates children's learning. The next section explores ways of promoting and extending children's use of table toys.

IV. Interacting with Children in the Table Toy Area: The Teacher's Role

In the *Creative Curriculum,* the teacher's primary role is that of facilitator of learning. Teachers are there to provide encouragement, help children get involved, introduce skills, and talk to children about their efforts and accomplishments. The teacher does this by observing, reacting to, and reinforcing what children are doing, and by extending and enriching children's play. Each of these facets of the teacher's role is described in the following sections.

Observing Children's Use of Table Toys

Before determining an appropriate strategy for interacting with children in the table toy area, teachers need to have a certain degree of knowledge about the children in their care. Teachers need to know which toys and materials the children are selecting and what the children do with the materials they select. Teachers also need to know how often individual children use the table toy area and whether children play alone or with other children. Data of this sort provide teachers with an understanding of what children are doing in the table toy area so that they can respond appropriately to children's needs.

Most educators agree that a teacher's best tool for gathering such background data is observation. Teachers can conduct observations in one of two ways:

- observing the table toy area for a set period of time (10-15 minutes) over a course of several days, or
- observing individual children and following them through their entire stay in the table toy area.

Both approaches provide necessary information on activity in the table toy area. To ensure that this information is recorded accurately, teachers can take written notes of their observations as the events they are watching occur. These notes serve not only as insurance against forgetting anything important but also as a log for future study.

As they take notes, teachers should record information in developmental terms and in all areas: cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical. Are children exploring the table toys or creatively experimenting with them? What logic and reasoning skills do children use when they are playing with table toys? Do children look either overwhelmed or bored with particular activities? Answers to these questions will prove useful in planning an appropriate program for children.

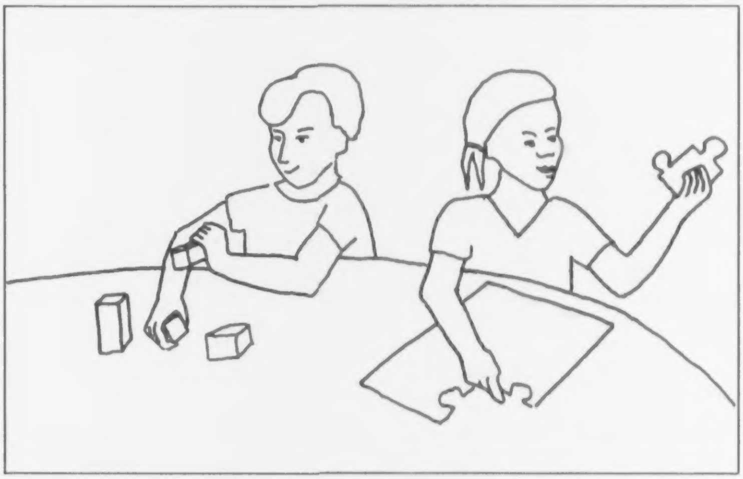
Observations are also helpful for teachers to see how children use available materials. This helps teachers to determine the effectiveness of the present inventory. For example, teachers can observe if the table toys are

- interesting and appealing to the children;
- age appropriate;

- varied enough to maintain the children's interest;
- flexible enough to be used by different children in different ways; and
- capable of providing a balance between individual and cooperative play.

To illustrate, if observation reveals that a particular table toy is not being used, it may be that this toy is either too simple or too complex for the group or that it has been out too long and the children are no longer interested. In either event, that toy should be removed. If observation shows children continually fighting over Legos, for instance, a larger supply of building toys is most likely necessary.

Thus, through careful and regular observations, teachers can gather important information on how well the table toy area is working as an activity area and for the individual children who use it.



Reacting to Children in the Table Toy Area

Once they have collected observational data, teachers should have a good idea of what children are doing in the table toy area and what might be done to improve the quality of their interactions. One of the first actions teachers can take is to encourage full use of the table toy area, particularly when observations reveal that some children never use the area or appear to be stuck.

A child who is reluctant to use table toys may be willing to go to the area if the teacher goes, too. The promise of personal attention for a few minutes is a powerful incentive. Just the fact that an adult is there may support the child enough to make him or her want to try something new.

Some children obviously need more help than this. Learning to be independent, make choices, and take initiative may be a slow process requiring many weeks of encouragement from the teacher. If such children find it difficult to make choices, the teacher can select a few toys and put them out on the table. A personal invitation can help a child get started: "Maybe you'd like to try this puzzle, Mary."

What is important at this stage is to build the child's self-confidence to the point where the child is willing to risk being in the table toy area without the teacher. How long this process takes will vary according to the child's developmental capabilities, ego strength, and the toy being used. It may take just a few moments of the teacher's time or it may require intensive support. Eventually, though, all children can be encouraged to regard the table toy area as an exciting place for play.

In addition to providing encouragement to reluctant children, teachers may actually need to teach skills needed to work with the different table toys. For example, a child who has had little previous experience with puzzles may need to be shown step by step that to complete a puzzle, one must:

- spill out the pieces;
- turn them all over so that the painted side is in view;
- start putting them back along the edge matching the outline;
- put each piece in next to one that is there until the whole picture is made; and
- either do the puzzle a second time or return it to the designated place on the shelf.

Knowing how to break down a task into steps is itself a very important skill for children to learn. The table toy area is a good place to work with children on this skill. All the steps that the experienced person does without really thinking present new learning for the beginner. And everyone is a beginner with materials they haven't seen or used before.

Reinforcing What Children Do in the Table Toy Area

An important way to reinforce what children do with table toys is to acknowledge their efforts and allow them to talk about what they are doing. Children need ample opportunities to demonstrate their accomplishments. Talking with children about their play in the table toy area accomplishes several things.

- It introduces new vocabulary and encourages conversation.
- It helps children become more aware of what they are doing, what they are discovering, and what they think and feel.

- It gives children the message that the teacher cares about them and recognizes what they are able to do.

- It identifies concepts and labels them: "These are the smaller blocks" or "You have the shiny pegs."

When talking with children about their play, teachers first need to ask them to describe what they are doing. For children who may have difficulty expressing themselves, teachers might take the lead in the conversation by providing nonjudgmental observations about the children's activities.

- "Tell me about the puzzle you put together."

- "I see you are using all the red pegs and some of the purple pegs."

- "You matched the two elephants. Here's a picture of a giraffe. Can you find the other giraffe?"

- "I see you've put all the circles in one pile and all the squares in another pile."

- "You used the parquetry blocks to make your own design."

With experience, even shy children will learn to express themselves and begin to describe their efforts. By focusing on the process--what they are doing and how they are doing it--children develop thinking, planning, and organizing skills.

Extending and Enriching Children's Play with Table Toys

One of the constant decisions teachers have to make in teaching is knowing when to intervene in children's play. Generally, teachers should not interfere with children's activities but rather let children progress at their own rate, in their own way. However, every teacher knows that all children periodically need assistance if they are to flourish. Judging when it is best to provide this assistance is a task that requires no small amount of consideration on the teacher's part. Fortunately, observational data can assist teachers in picking up cues for deciding when intervention is appropriate. Listed below are several situations in which teacher intervention is not only appropriate but suggested.

Intervening When Children Are Bored with Table Toys

Children may lose interest in the table toy area if the materials are too simple or too complex. If pieces are missing from the puzzles and toys or the area looks messy and unappealing, children may stop using the area altogether.

Even if the children aren't bored, they frequently reach a point where they are doing the same thing over and over and not learning anything new. Since one of the primary goals in early childhood education is to help children develop new skills, more challenging table toys should be added periodically to stimulate creativity. New collectibles, such as wallpaper scraps or a seashell collection, can spark renewed interest in sorting and categorizing games. New lotto games, some of which are more challenging, can also be added to recapture children's enthusiasm. Similarly, new props for building activities such as dollhouse furniture or family sets, can increase children's interest in the table toy area.

When rotating or adding new toys, it is important to remember that children like to continue using toys they have mastered; thus, when more complicated puzzles are added, all the simpler ones should not be removed. Teachers should be sure to leave those table toys which are the children's favorites or are so flexible that the children are always finding new ways to use them (e.g., Legos).

Introducing New Ways to Use Toys

Probably the single most important way in which teachers can expand and enrich children's play with table toys is to help them discover new and creative ways to use materials with which they are already familiar. In this way the teacher introduces new vocabulary and concepts, fosters the development of thinking and planning skills, and enhances socio-emotional development. Through observation, teachers can learn to recognize when intervention along these lines is appropriate. The examples below illustrate the types of statements teachers can make to extend children's play.

- "You've picked out blocks that are all the same. How are they the same?"
- "You've stacked five ring-a-majigs. What would happen if you added two more?"
- "You've built a whole city with the Lego blocks. Does anyone live in your city?"
- "I see you figured out a way to make all the pattern blocks fit together. What other patterns could you make with the same blocks?"
- "You put all the cylinders in the holes. How did you know which cylinder fit in which hole?"
- "Look at the pattern I made on the matrix board. One peg is missing. Can you put the missing peg in the box?"

Play can also be extended by having children follow simple directions:

- "Can you make a tower with two blue cubes and two purple ones?"
- "Can you line those up so the tallest pieces are on the side of this table and the smallest pieces are on the other side?"

Making Up Games

In addition to giving verbal suggestions and initiating spontaneous games, teachers can set the stage for further play by creating new games and activities for children. The following six examples all use common table toys.

Example 1: Feeling Shapes. A matching game that uses the sense of touch; teaches concepts of "same"; needs an adult.

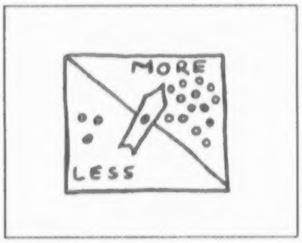
- Take a small cloth bag or any other type of bag that the child can reach into but cannot see through.
- Put a selection of beads, parquetry blocks, or attribute blocks in the bag (start with two; add more as children get used to the game).
- Give the child a bead or block to hold and feel.
- Ask the child to find (by feeling, not looking) a bead or block of the same shape inside the bag.
- The child brings out the bead or block to show and compare. Are they the same shape?
- Talk about the name of the shape and how it feels.
- Try again with a different shape.

Once the child knows the name of each shape, the game can be made more complicated.

- Use only beads or parquetry or attribute blocks that have a clearly recognizable shape such as round, square, egg-shaped (oval).
- Put a selection in the bag.
- Ask the child to find the shape you name (by feeling, not looking).

Example 2: More and Less. A counting game that uses the visual sense; reinforces understanding of concepts of "more" and "less"; has two players; needs an adult if children don't yet know the meaning of more and less.

Preparation: Make a spinner. On a square piece of cardboard, draw a diagonal line between corners. This divides the square in half. Label one half "MORE" and the other half "LESS." Cover with clear adhesive-backed paper for durability. (For a sturdy spinner, mount the cardboard on a square board of scrap wood.) Make a wide cardboard arrow and cover it with clear adhesive-backed paper. Punch a hole in the arrow and attach the arrow to the cardboard (and its mounting board, if one is used) with a nail at the center.



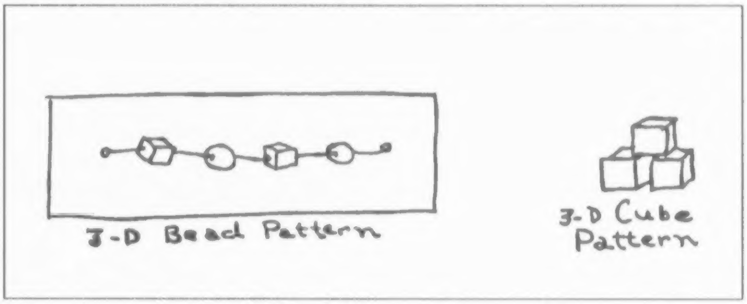
- Each player chooses a color and gets 20 objects (pegs, beads, cubes).
- At each turn, both players put out any number from zero to five.
- Adult asks "who put out more?" and "who put out less?"
- One player spins (children can take turns spinning).
- If the arrow stops on LESS, the child with less out takes all that are out.
- If the arrow stops on MORE, the child with more out takes all that are out.
- The game continues as long as the children want to play.
- The objects are divided again and the game starts over.

Example 3: Following Instructions. Enhances language development and visual discrimination; played in pairs, with older four- and five-year-olds.

- Give each child the same set of materials (cubes or pegs of different colors, a string and some beads, or a set of attribute blocks).
- Have each child put up a "screen" (a box top works well) so no one can see what anyone else is doing.
- Make a pattern piece by piece, telling the children what you are doing with each piece.
- The others are supposed to do exactly what you are doing.
- Take down the screens and see if everyone's pattern came out the same. If they are different, talk about why differences might have occurred.
- Let the children take turns giving the instructions.

Example 4: Sequence or Patterning Activities. Use stringing beads, pegs, cubes, or parquetry blocks; lead the child from random designs to complex patterns; help develop reading readiness skills in particular; may require some preparation by the teacher, but the children can work on them alone.

- Give the children a chance to explore the objects. Let them make several "necklaces" or designs over a period of time.
- After several days, say to a child, "I like your design. I'm going to try to make one just like it." Then do so, describing the process. The child gets the idea that a pattern can be copied and is usually quite pleased that the teacher is interested in copying his or her design.
- Make a pattern in beads on a string or in cubes on the table and suggest that the child make a similar one. This is an exercise in copying a three-dimensional pattern.



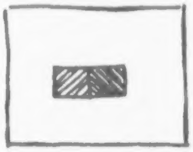
- Cut out paper forms that match the color and shape of the beads, cubes, or blocks. Cut strips (3" x 12" is a convenient size) from white cardboard. Keep them handy in a box. When the child has made an interesting pattern, ask if the child would like to make a picture of it with your assistance. Find the right colors and shapes in the box and paste them onto a strip in the order the child did on the string or table.
- With crayons or the paper forms, make patterns of cards for the child to follow. This is similar to the previous step but at a more advanced level. (For this stage only, there are commercially available pattern cards for some of this material.) The first pattern could be all the same type of bead or block. Then two beads or colors of blocks could be added to the pattern. The activity can be made as complex as a particular child can handle.

Example 5: Beginning Math Games. Use pegs and pegboard; introduce addition and the concept of "sets," which is basic to math; need an adult.

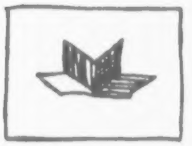
- Ask a child to put one peg in the first row and two in the second, adding one more for each row. Have the child count pegs in each row. Look at the step design made by pegs.
- Give the child addition problems such as this: "Put one red peg and two blue pegs in the first row. Fill the second row with yellow pegs until it is just as long as the first. How many yellow pegs did you use?"

Example 6: Duplicating Patterns. Use parquetry or pattern blocks; enhance visual discrimination and fine muscle development.

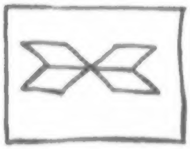
- Make a series of pattern cards for children to duplicate. The cards can be made increasingly complex.



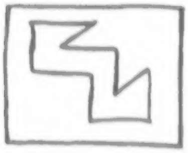
Very simple--one block, two in a row



Simple figures with each block drawn in color and shape

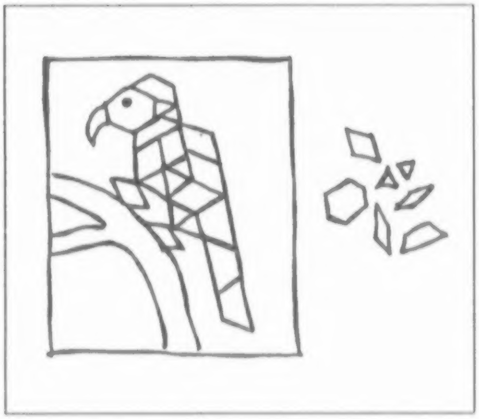


Figures with shapes outlined but not colored



Outline of figure only

- Copy an original design made by a child and have the child match blocks to the design.
- For a complex picture like the one below, have the children sort out the necessary pieces and put them in a plastic cup or can; have them available with the picture.



This section has presented techniques for observing, reacting to, reinforcing, extending, and enriching children's play with table toys. Taken together, these techniques help teachers foster children's socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical growth in the classroom. The next section gives suggestions for tying in the table toy program with the child's home life.

V. Supporting Children's Table Toy Play: The Parent's Role

An underlying principle of the *Creative Curriculum* is that children learn best when the school's program is supported by the child's family environment. Of all the materials in a preschool room, table toys are the ones most commonly found in the home. This section outlines ways to help parents collect and use table toys effectively with their children.

Involving Parents in Using Table Toys

Most parents at one time or another purchase a variety of table toys for their children. Parents know that their children enjoy playing with these toys; this is usually the motivation for such purchases. However, helping parents to recognize that table toys can enhance many learning opportunities will extend the usefulness of materials parents typically have at home.

Table toys can be discussed in parent meetings, when parents visit the classroom, or during parent-teacher conferences. An especially effective technique is to plan a workshop on the subject of table toys in which parents have an opportunity to see and use the toys. The following guidelines may be helpful in planning such a workshop.

- Hold the workshop in the classroom so parents can see the actual materials their children use.
- Demonstrate the various types of toys and materials and ask parents what they think children learn when using each type of toy.
- Give parents time to experiment with the toys.
- Ask parents to describe their experiences in trying out the toys.
- Have the group summarize the value of each toy.

As part of the workshop, talk with parents about the types of table toys they generally purchase for their children. Many teachers find that parents welcome suggestions for the types of toys and materials that would be most appropriate for their child's age and abilities. Parents are also interested in knowing which table toys their children use in school and which are their favorites. Parents may appreciate a written summary of the value and importance of table toys, based on the information found in Sections I and II.

Encouraging Table Toy Play at Home

Many of these ideas presented in this module apply to the home use of table toys. Of particular interest to parents would be the information contained in Section III on constructing homemade toys. Through a newsletter or workshop handout, teachers can provide parents with step-by-step information on making toys for use in the home. At the same time, teachers can solicit parental assistance in making toys for use in the classroom.

Teachers can also help parents learn how to facilitate their children's development by using table toys to build skills. In particular, teachers can show parents how toys can be used to enhance these areas of learning:

- sorting and categorizing;
- planning and organizing;
- fine muscle use; and
- math and reading readiness.

As an accompaniment to this process, teachers can help parents extend learning in these areas by involving their children in ordinary household chores, as the following examples illustrate.

Sorting and Categorizing

- Children can help sort the laundry at home: dark and light colors, light and heavy clothing, like-colored socks, and so on.
- Children and parents can talk about grouping food by category. Which are fruits, which are meats? Which are commonly eaten at breakfast or dinner? Which foods are purchased at a bakery? A delicatessen? A farm?
- Which household tools and equipment are used for cleaning? Repairing? Washing?

Planning and Organization

- Which clothing is worn for warm weather? For cool weather? Which colors go together?
- Which foods need to go on the shopping list?
- How does the family get to the library and drugstore?

Fine Muscle Development

- Children can help set the table.
- Children can help dust the furniture.
- Children can cook with a parent.

Math and Reading Readiness Skill Development

- Children can practice one-to-one correspondence by learning to set the table.

- Children can practice matching like objects by pairing socks or finding labels on foods that are the same colors.

- Children can learn about classification by sorting buttons by size, shape, and color.

- Children can learn about seriation by lining up cups by size, or finding leaves or rocks outside and ordering them by size.

Teachers can also assist parents by providing guidelines for purchasing, repairing, and storing toys. The following guidelines may be helpful for parents.

- When selecting toys, find ones that are age appropriate. Most toys have recommended ages on the package, and these are usually (though not always) accurate.

- Be sure all toys are nontoxic and safe.

- The boxes toys come in get ripped and torn, and pieces fall out. Toys at home can better be stored in shoe boxes, sturdy cardboard boxes, plastic food containers, or plastic tubs.

- Toys at home should be rotated. Periodically, a toy that is no longer being used should be put away for several weeks. When it is later taken out, the child is likely to have a renewed interest in the toy.

- Too many toys and materials can be overwhelming to children; a playroom or bookshelf that is piled with toys can be as unappealing as one in which there are only one or two toys available.

Teachers can work hand in hand with parents to ensure that the learning that takes place in the table toy area at school is reinforced and enhanced at home. By working together, parents and teachers can provide children with unique opportunities for physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive growth through the use of table toys.

VI. For Further Reading on Table Toys

Baratta-Lorton, Mary. *Workjobs.* Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1972.

Bits and Pieces--Imaginative Uses for Children's Learning. Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1967.

Charlesworth, Rosalind, and D. J. Radeloff. *Experiences in Mathematics for Young Children.* Albany, NY: Delmar Publishing, 1978.

Forman, George E., and D. S. Kuschner. *The Child's Construction of Knowledge: Piaget for Teaching Children.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1983.

Kamili, C. *Numbers in Preschool and Kindergarten: Educational Implications of Piaget's Theory.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1982.

Art

I. Introduction to Art: Philosophy and Theory 189

- What Is Art and Why Is It Important? 189
- Developmental Stages in Art 189

II. Children at Play in the Art Area: Goals and Objectives 198

- Goals for Children's Art Play 198
- Learning Objectives for Children in the Art Area 199

III . Setting Up the Art Area: The Physical Environment 201

- Arranging the Art Area 201
- Selecting Materials for the Art Area 202
- Displaying Art Materials and Supplies 212
- Drying and Displaying Children's Artwork 220

IV. Interacting with Children in the Art Area: The Teacher's Role 222

- Observing Children at Play in the Art Area 222
- Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Play in the Art Area 223
- Extending and Enriching Children's Experiences in the Art Area 225
- Scheduling Art Activities 243

V. Supporting Children's Art Play: The Parent's Role 245

- Planning a Parent Workshop on Children's Art 245
- Encouraging Art at Home 246

VI. For Further Reading on Children's Art 248

I. Introduction to Art: Philosophy and Theory

What Is Art and Why Is It Important?

Most children enjoy art. They love the process of applying paint to paper, gluing things together, and pounding a lump of clay. Working with art materials allows children to be spontaneous in their experiments with color, shape, and texture. Among the many benefits of art for the young child are the following:

- Art promotes creativity.
- Exploring a variety of art media is enjoyable.
- Working with art materials develops physical skills such as eye-hand coordination and control over small muscle movements.
- Artwork instills pride in accomplishments.

For the preschool child, it is the process of creating that is important, not the product. Through their art, children express how they feel, think, and view the world. Art is an outlet that lets children convey what they are not able to say in words. Using art materials also encourages children to make choices, try out ideas, plan, and experiment. They learn to examine the properties of an art material and discover, through trial and error, what the material can do or how it can be used. Art thus enables children to learn at the same time that they are expressing themselves and having fun.

Developmental Stages in Art

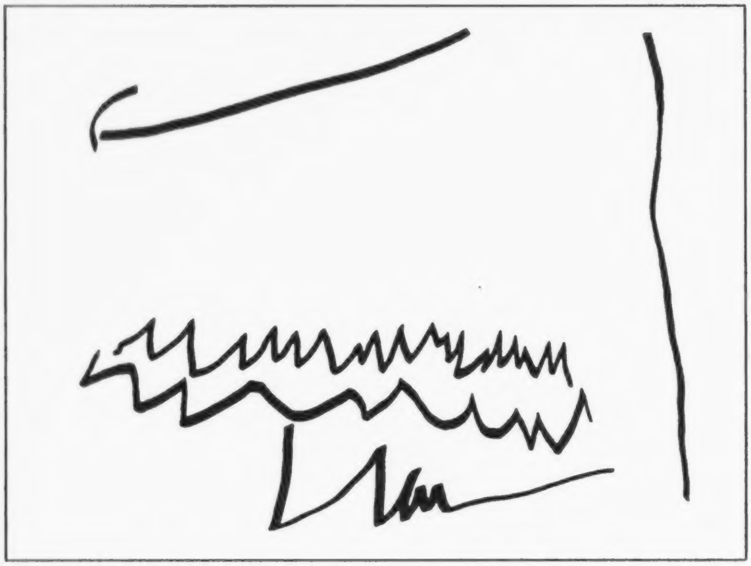
As with all areas of development, children's skills in the use of art materials increase in predictable stages. Children move through these stages at their own rates, reflecting their own timetables for development. For the purposes of describing children's developmental stages, different types of art activities will be examined.

Drawing

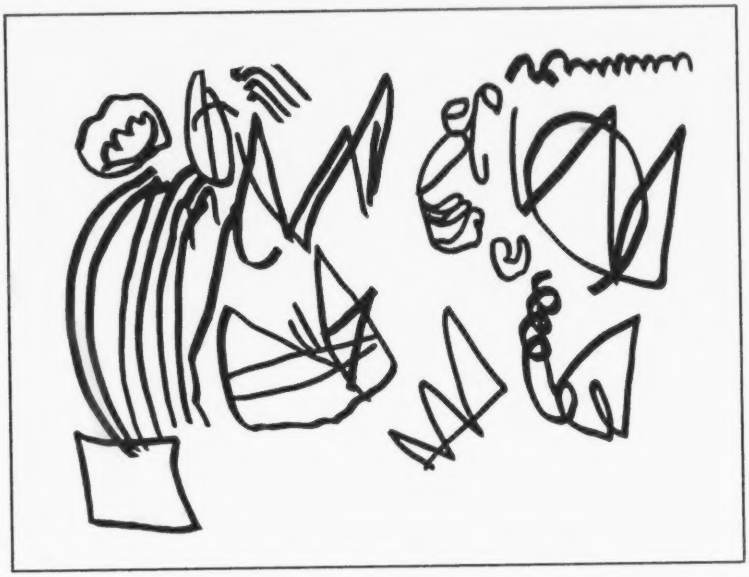
In drawing, children go through four specific stages as they learn to hold and manipulate a crayon, pencil, or marker and use it to create something of their own design:

- disordered scribbling;
- controlled scribbling;
- naming a picture that was not planned; and
- representational drawing.

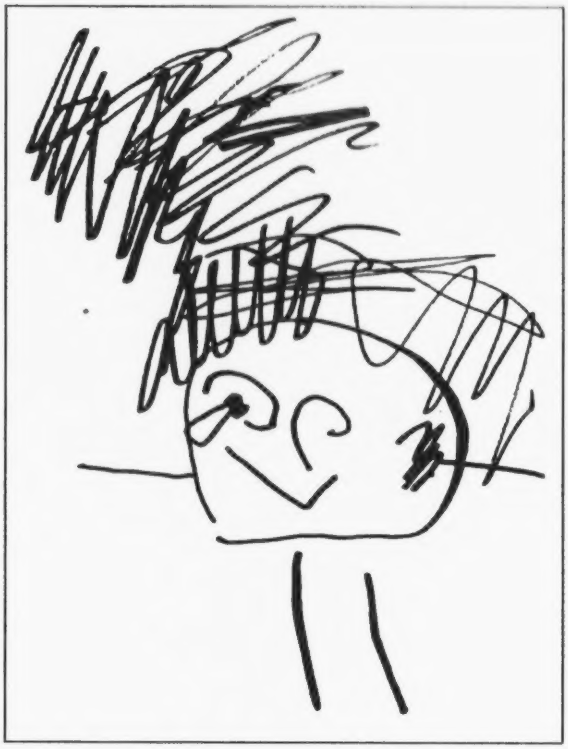
At about a year and a half, children begin to pick up a crayon or pencil and use it. They go through a long period of experimenting and developing muscle control--that is, learning to hold the crayon and to make a mark on the paper. Rather suddenly, they pick up on new experiences involving different colors, lines, pressures, and directions. Children make discoveries through repeated experiments. At first, children experiment as they use large motions and make lines of differing lengths. The early "pictures" produced by two-year-olds are rather aptly called "disordered scribblings."



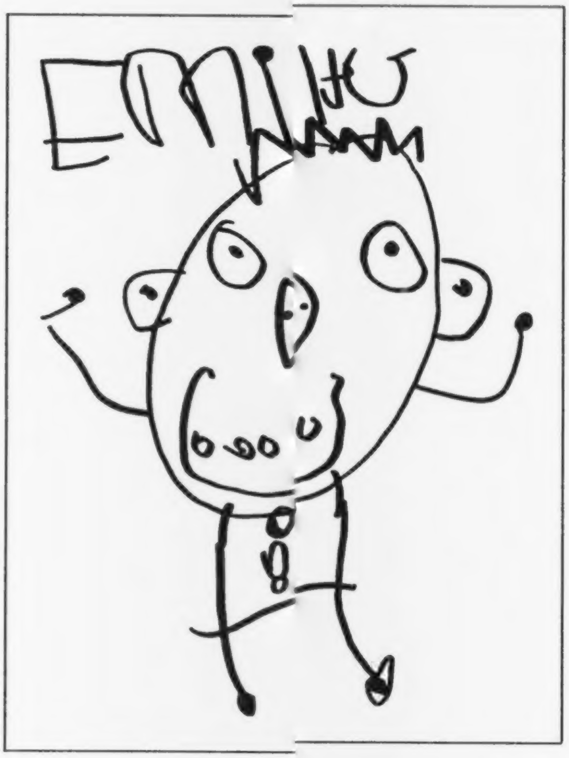
Gradually, children begin to gain mastery over their disordered scribblings. Through continued drawings, they begin to make patterns, to repeat patterns, and to see designs in their scribblings. At this stage, their drawings are dubbed "controlled scribblings."



Once children learn to control a crayon or pencil, they begin to see reality in their drawings. They name what they have done: what adults see as scribbles become a house or a person to the young child. Most children enter the naming stage when they are about three and one-half years old. Children in this stage don't always plan their pictures beforehand. Often, they start to draw and what shows up on the paper makes them think of something.

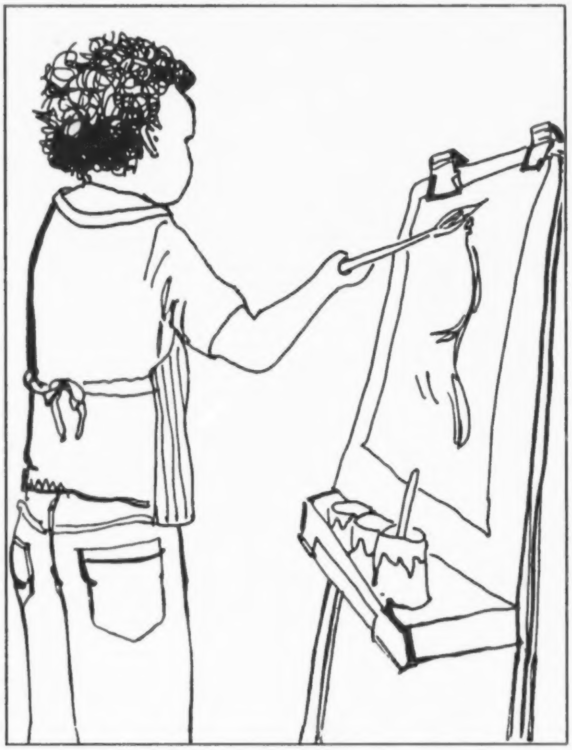


As children gain experience, they are more likely to plan their drawings and afterward sign their names.

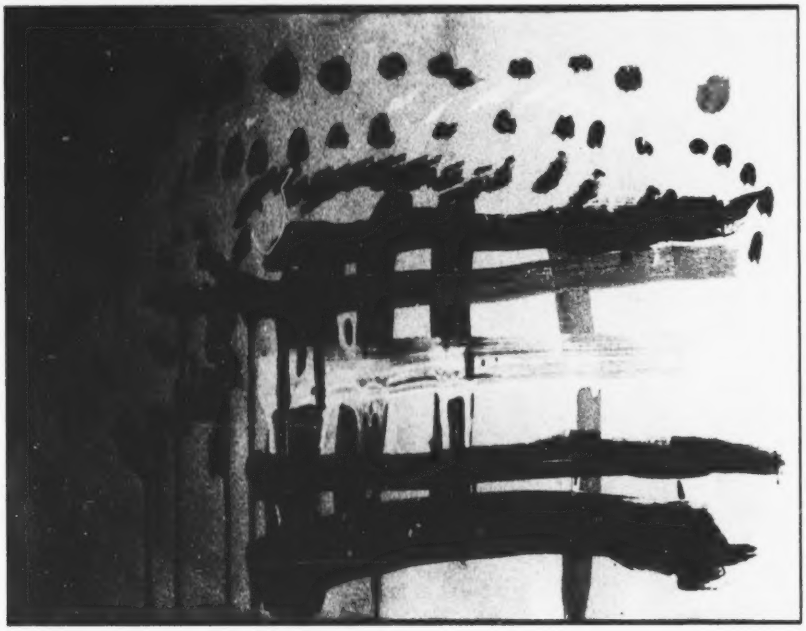


Painting

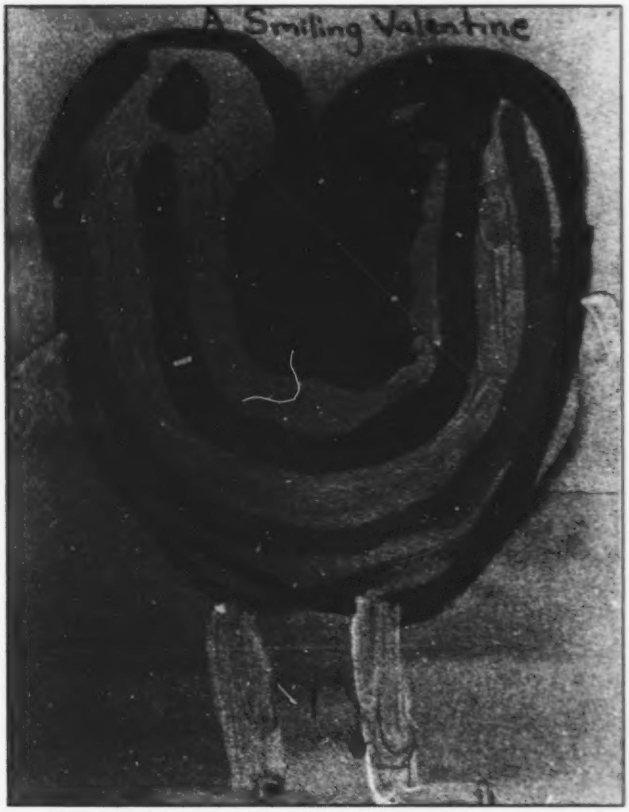
Children move through very much the same stages in painting as they do in drawing. The only real difference is that instead of developing skill in using a crayon, pencil or marker, children are learning to master the use of a brush dipped in liquid.



Like their scribblings, children's paintings progress from random lines to representational pictures. In fact, children go through the same four stages in painting as in drawing: disordered painting; controlled painting; naming paintings that were not planned; and planned representational paintings.



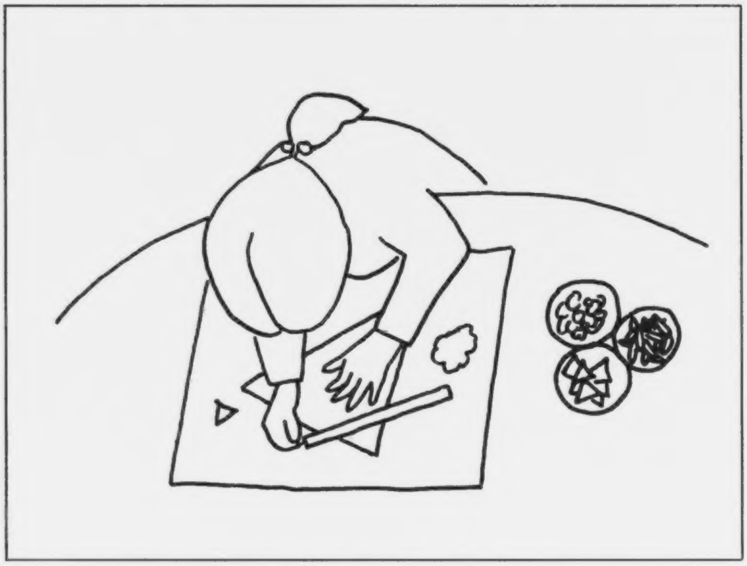
These stages roughly span the ages of 18 months to six years. However, each child will progress through the four stages at an individual pace that reflects the child's capabilities and previous art experiences.



Other Art Media and Experiences

Children approach other types of art media and experiences, such as clay, collages, and weaving, in a similarly gradual way. Although the stages children go through in working with other media are not as clear-cut as the stages in drawing and painting, children's use of these media is nonetheless of a distinctly developmental nature. Essentially all children's art moves from a stage of exploration to one of experimentation. Initially, children familiarize themselves with the medium: What does clay feel like? How does a loom work? What will make the collage items stick? Children need to use all their senses to become comfortable with a particular medium before they can begin to use it meaningfully. Gradually, as they become familiar with the new medium, children start to experiment with it. They roll play dough into worms. They attach pot holder loops to prongs in a loom--not necessarily those which will lead to successful weaving though. They paste pictures on cardboard to see how they look when glued to a surface.

With increased practice and experience, these experimentations start to become more purposeful and skilled. Eventually, children are able to turn clay into an animal or person, to weave designs on a loom, and to make a collage representing a planned concept. Their increasing skills enable children to become even more creative using a variety of art media.



This section has presented the theoretical and philosophical framework for the development of children's artwork. The section that follows outlines goals and objectives that teachers can establish for children's development through art experiences.

II. Children at Play in the Art Area: Goals and Objectives

The art area affords a rich environment for the development of fine motor skills, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Working on their own or in a small group, children enjoy both the process and end results of their efforts.

Goals for Children's Art Play

The teacher can select a number of important goals for children to achieve as they explore and use a variety of art materials. Although the actual choice of goals should reflect the ages and interests of the children, teachers using the *Creative Curriculum* might consider the following goals for guidance in making programming decisions.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To enhance creativity.
- To learn about cause and effect.
- To recognize colors, shapes, and textures.
- To enhance capabilities in planning, organizing, and carrying out a task.
- To express thoughts and ideas through artwork.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To express feelings through artwork.
- To take pride in accomplishments.
- To express individuality.

Goals for Physical Development

- To demonstrate increased small motor skills.
- To refine eye-hand coordination.

Learning Objectives for Children in the Art Area

Within these broad areas there are specific learning objectives that teachers can target for children in the art area. The precise choice of objectives should be a function of the individual needs of the children in the classroom. The following objectives are given as guidelines for teachers who are planning an art program.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To represent concepts and thoughts creatively through art materials.
- To identify how properties change--for instance, when tempera paint dries, when salt and flour are formed into play dough, and so forth.
- To note cause and effect by mixing colors together, wetting chalk, gluing paper, and so on.
- To identify colors, shapes, and textures and to recognize their unique properties.
- To try out ideas and find solutions to problems.
- To note similarities and differences when using materials.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To experience the joy of exploring a variety of art media.
- To exhibit pride and satisfaction in successfully completing an art activity.
- To work with a variety of art materials.
- To work independently on a project, seeing it through to completion.
- To make choices based on one's own opinion and viewpoints.
- To develop an aesthetic sense.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To develop small motor skills by cutting with scissors, molding clay, painting with a brush, and using other art materials.
- To develop eye-hand coordination by making collages, weaving, and manipulating other art materials.
- To use writing and drawing tools with increasing control and intention.
- To use balance in creating structures with art materials.

Taken together, these learning objectives can help teachers plan appropriate art experiences for young children. By targeting specific goals and objectives, teachers can more easily select the art media and activities that will help children expand and increase their skills. The next section offers suggestions for setting up an attractive, appealing, and effective art area.

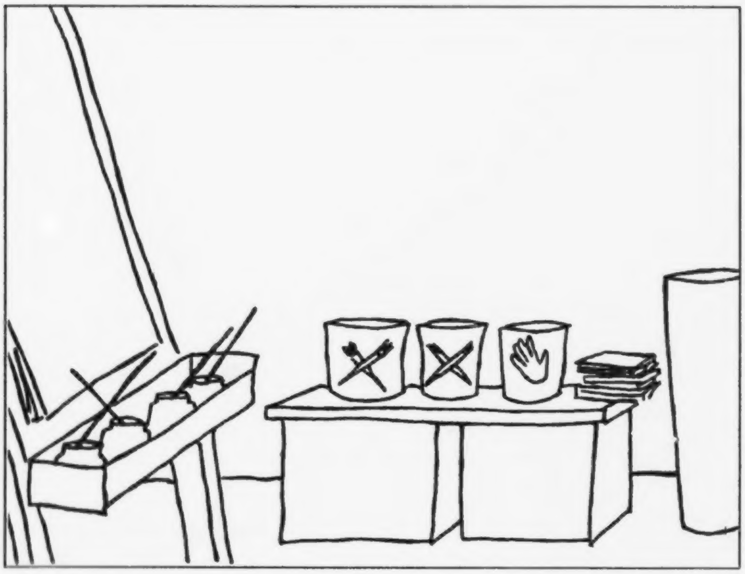
III. Setting Up the Art Area: The Physical Environment

There is a direct relationship between how the art area is set up and how effective this interest area will be in facilitating children's learning. If the art area is inviting, there is a high likelihood that children will want to become involved with art materials. But if the art area looks messy, overwhelming, or barren, it is not at all likely that children will want to play there. Children's creativity flourishes in an environment that is both appealing and well-organized.

Arranging the Art Area

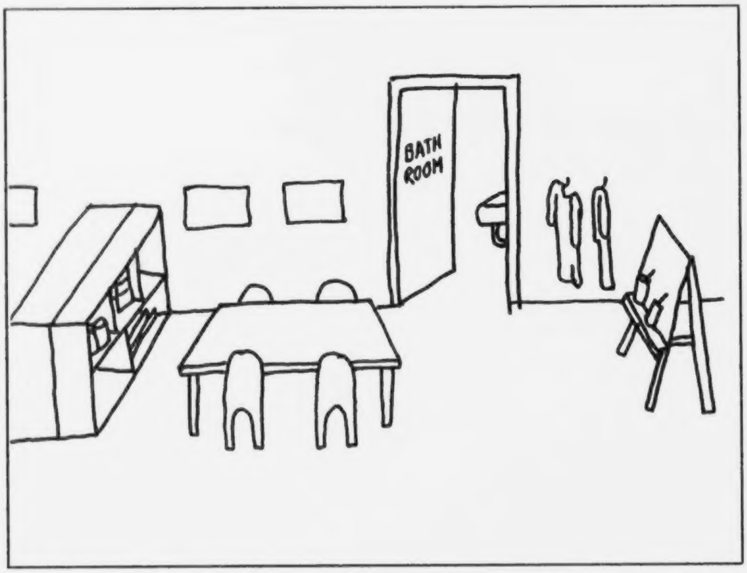
For teachers selecting an area of the classroom for art, the following factors need to be taken into consideration:

- **The art area should have enough space for children to work comfortably**. If possible, children should have the option of working at easels, at a table, and sometimes on the floor. The area should be large enough to accommodate a table on which activities that require room, such as finger painting, can take place.
- **The art area should be near a source of water**. Because painting and many other art activities need water both for use and cleanup, it is helpful to locate the art area close to a water supply. If this is not possible, buckets of water can be brought to the art area and used to wash brushes as well as hands.



- **The art area should be out of the line of traffic.** Such an arrangement promotes independent work and it also reduces the chances that a child will trip over an easel or get accidentally painted.

Shown below is an example of an art area that incorporates these design features.



Selecting Materials for the Art Area

Art materials can be as diverse as creativity and funds allow. Glitter, styrofoam, and feathers, to name just a few materials, spark children's imaginations and enhance their artwork. Before gathering together exotic or highly challenging materials such as these, however, teachers should first ensure that the art area is stocked with basics such as the following:

- something to paint on (an easel with paper),
- something to paint with (brushes, paints),
- something to draw with (crayons, markers, pencils),
- something to draw on (a variety of paper),
- something that puts things together (paste or glue),
- something that cuts (scissors),

- something to mold (clay, play dough), and
- something to clean up with (mops, sponges, brooms, towels).

The following chart presents detailed information on basic art supplies suggested for the *Creative Curriculum* art area.

BASIC ART SUPPLIES

Easel

Posters
Paper, newsprint
Brushes

Pencils and Pens

Fat pencils
Pens with a broad surface

Crayons

Variety of colors
Both large and small
Good quality so that color is clear and even

Chalk

White
Colored
Chalkboard(s)

Scissors

Safety scissors for three-year-olds
Right- and left-handed scissors
Training scissors
Loop-handled scissors

Magic Markers

Variety of colors
Water based

Clay and Play Dough

Homemade or purchased
Clay that can be baked/hardened and painted
Clay that remains soft
Tools for using clay and play dough, such as cookie cutters, plastic knives, rolling pins, and objects that make impressions

Paper

Newsprint
Construction paper in a variety of colors
Drawing paper

Paste and Glue

Paste for materials such as paper fabrics, wood, and cardboard

Clear-Up Materials

Mop
Sponges
Buckets
Paper towels
Plastic tablecloth
Broom
Smocks for children

Finger Paint

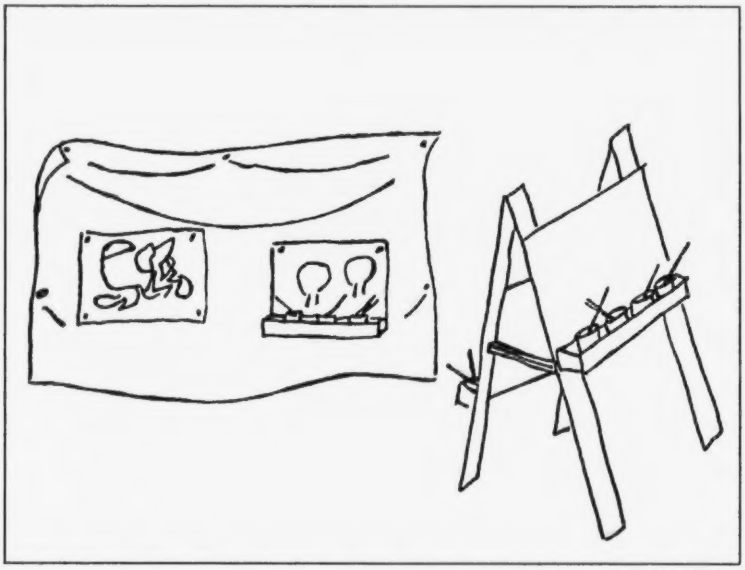
Variety of colors

Setting Up the Painting Area with Basics

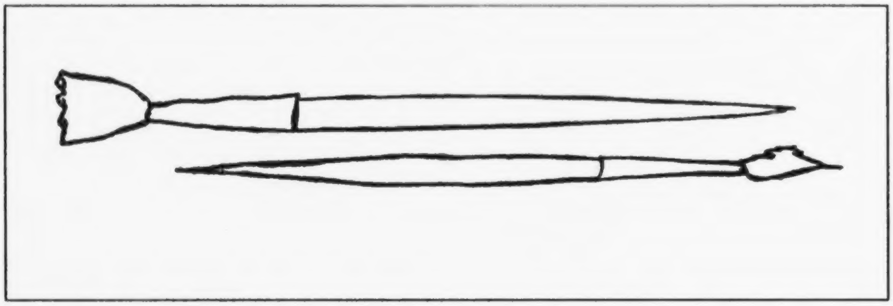
As can be seen from the list of basics, painting is an important part of the preschool art curriculum. Although painting is basically an individual activity, children sometimes enjoy talking to each other while painting and like to see what other children are doing. For these reasons, teachers should consider including at least two easels in the art area. Two easels promote socialization and reduce the amount of time children have to wait for a turn.

There are two types of easels: free-standing and wall easels. When space is a problem, easels that are attached to the wall provide more floor space. Free-standing easels should be two-sided so that two children can paint at the same time. They should be sturdy, in good repair, and adjustable in height. These easels can be bought or made by a teacher or parent who is good at carpentry.

Wall easels can also be purchased and attached permanently to the wall. An alternative is to select a wall for painting and cover it with a large piece of plastic or a drop cloth. Then easel paper can be tacked to the wall at an appropriate height for the children.



The best brushes for use in the painting area are those which have metal bands with no seams. This construction secures the bristles so that they do not shed. Brushes come in either flat or round shapes. Flat bristle brushes are suggested for beginning painters; round brushes can be added for variety later on. No matter what shape of brush is used, though, young children need long-handled brushes for painting.



As children gain experience, teachers can supplement long-handled paint brushes with short-handled brushes, pastry brushes, and wall-painting brushes for new painting experiences.

Several different kinds of paints are available, each offering a different kind of art experience:

- powdered tempera,
- liquid tempera (already mixed),
- water-based paint, and
- finger paint.

The main advantage to powdered tempera is that it is less expensive than pre-mixed paint. One problem is that it begins to sour after a few days. Two solutions to this problem are to mix smaller amounts in advance or to refrigerate the paint to keep it longer. Alcohol or oil of wintergreen can also be added to make it last longer.

Liquid tempera is more expensive but lasts longer. For the preschool classroom, liquid tempera in vibrant colors and with a thick texture should be used. If teachers are sure that the children no longer put things in their mouths, less expensive and more watery tempera can be thickened by adding liquid dishwashing detergent.

Water-based paints, which include poster paint and water colors, are also good to use with children, but not at the easel. With both these paints, smaller brushes are needed. Water-based paints come in small jars (poster paint) or pre-packaged trays (water colors). Children can use them at a table on a variety of papers.

Finger paints can be purchased or made. Glossy finger paint paper is very expensive and usually small in size. An alternative is to let children use finger paint directly on a formica table top. Painting directly on the table gives children lots of room and emphasizes the importance of experimenting with paint rather than smaking a picture. If a formica table is not available, children can paint on cafeteria trays or on a large piece of heavy-duty plastic (e.g., a shower curtain) that is stretched across the table and taped in place. If children want to have a picture of their finger paintings, any type of paper can be placed on top of their picture and pressed down to create a reverse imprint. There are many variations on finger painting that children also enjoy, such as using shaving cream with or without food coloring.

Finally, children can use several different types of paper for painting:

- colored construction paper,
- sandpaper,
- wrapping paper,
- egg separators,
- wallpaper samples, and
- styrofoam packing pieces (on the table rather than at the easel).

All these types of paper can be cut into different shapes and sizes to vary the painting experience.

The supplies children need for painting should be stored near the art table: brushes, paint, extra paper, and smocks. When everything they need for painting is nearby, children can independently paint and clean up with very little help from the teacher. Smocks can be purchased, but most teachers find it more economical to have the children wear used men's shirts from which the sleeves have been cut. The easels should be set up and available to the children every day.

Setting Up for Drawing and Pasting

In setting up an area for drawing and pasting, teachers should select materials that are sturdy, of good quality, and--above all--safe. Because young children have a tendency to put things in their mouths, it is of prime importance that all materials be nontoxic. In addition, teachers should follow the following guidelines for selecting drawing and pasting materials:

- **Magic markers** should be water based for easier cleaning.
- **Crayons** should be of good quality; that is, they should color evenly and steadily. Children respond to intensity of color; less expensive crayons are made with more wax and have less color. Using inferior crayons may be frustrating for children and less rewarding.
- **Left-handed scissors** should always be provided for children who are left-handed.
- **Art paper** (manila) is usually expensive. As alternatives, newsprint can be used for easel painting (18" x 24") and computer paper (18" x 11") donated and used for drawing, paper collages, and vegetable printing. Collect as many types of paper as possible

and use program funds to purchase those which cannot be collected (construction paper, butcher paper, etc.). Try getting the ends of rolls from a commercial newspaper; that way the paper is free and comes with the roller, which has many uses. One advantage to paper on a roll is that it can be cut to any length, which is especially useful for murals.

Clay and Play Dough

In addition to selecting these basic supplies, teachers should have on hand both clay and play dough. Each of these materials offers children a different type of art experience. Play dough is more pliable than clay. Although play dough can be readily purchased, teachers can make their own together with the children. Doing so not only saves money but also allows teachers to effectively vary the texture and color. Moreover, children enjoy being able to create their own art medium.

There are many recipes for play dough. Here are three that have been recommended by preschool teachers.

Recipe #1: Traditional play dough

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
2 tablespoons oil
1 cup water with food coloring

Children can easily help prepare this recipe. Mix all the ingredients together and then knead the dough. Store it in a plastic bag.

Recipe #2: A smoother variety of play dough

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
1 tablespoon cream of tartar
2 tablespoons oil
1 cup water with food coloring added

Mix the ingredients and heat in a pan, stirring constantly until the dough pulls away from the sides of the pan and forms a lump. Then knead the dough and store it in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Recipe #3: Play dough that hardens and can be painted

2 cups corn starch
1 cup baking soda
1 cup water and food coloring

Mix all the ingredients and cook, stirring constantly, until they form a ball. Knead the dough as it cools. It has an unusual and appealing texture. Store it in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Two types of clay are appropriate for young children: modeling clay (soft clay) and baking clay, which can be baked in a kiln or left to harden on its own. Modeling clay is useful for those times when children want to manipulate the clay and perhaps make balls, snakes, or different shapes as they play. Soft clay is also fun to use with rolling pins, plastic knives, or tongue depressors. Clay that hardens can be painted and the resulting creations saved.

The variety of art materials teachers can provide is limited only by their imaginations. A list of suggested supplemental art supplies follows; some of these items may stimulate creative ideas.

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL ART SUPPLIES

Natural Items

Acorns
Driftwood
Feathers
Dried flowers
Pine cones
Seashells
Seeds
Stones and pebbles

Sewing Items

Beads
Braid
Buttons
Cotton balls
Ribbon
Shoelaces
Snaps
Spools
Yarn

Fabrics(any size scraps)

Acetate
Burlap
Canvas
Cotton
Felt
Fur
Old gloves
Old hat
Lace
Leather
Oilcloth
Old socks
Wood
Large plastic needles

Kitchen/Laundry Items

Aluminum foil
Beans
Bottle tops
Candels
Cellophane and wax paper
Corks
Egg cartons
Grocery packages
Juice cans
Macaroni (can be dyed with food coloring and alcohol)
Milk containers
Paper bags
Paper cups
Paper plates
Paper doilies
Paper towels
Popsicle sticks
String/rope
Tin cans
Toothpicks
Coffee cans

Building materials (any size scraps)

Linoleum
Masonite
Metal pieces
Nails
Tiles
Wallboard
Wire
Wire mesh
Wood scraps

Paper (any size pieces)

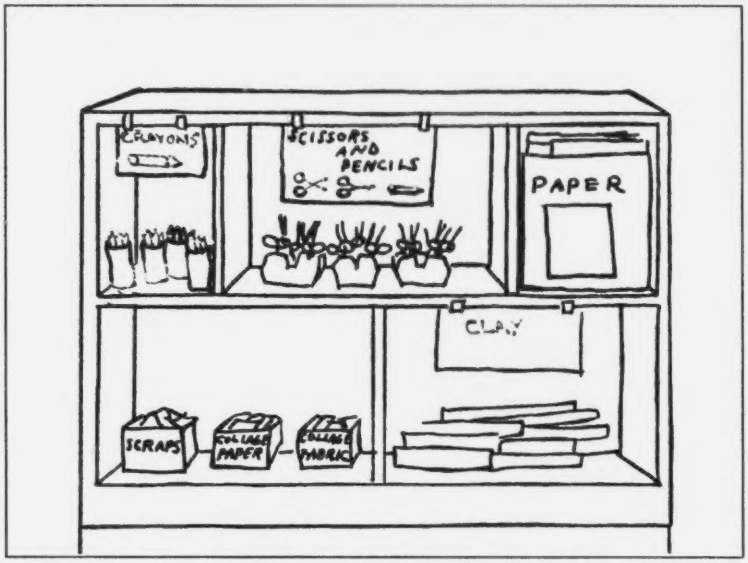
Cardboard
Cartons
Newspaper
Sandpaper
Tissue paper
Wallpaper
Wrapping paper
Computer paper
Cardboard tubes

Miscellaneous

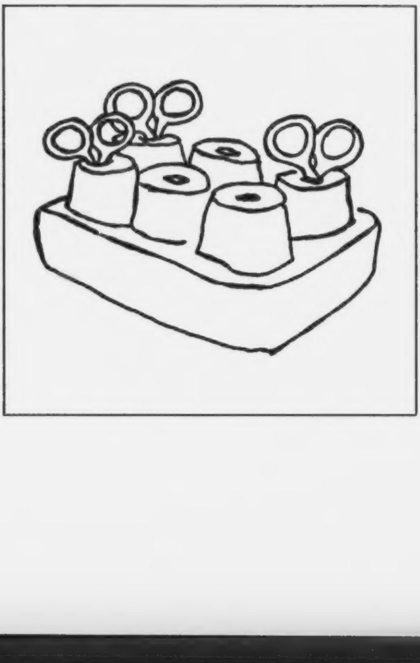
Containers of any kind (e.g., baby food jars, margarine tubs)
Clock parts
Pipe cleaners
Styrofoam or other packing materials
Tongue depressors
Wooden beads
Wooden dowels
Shoe boxes
Glitter
Stamp pads and stamps
Marbles
Paint rollers
Large brushes
Large and small plastic and metal paper clips

Displaying Art Materials and Supplies

When the shelves in the art area are orderly and inviting, children feel free to use and put away the materials they need. To facilitate both the use of art supplies and the cleaning-up process, items should be grouped together by their function--for example, collage materials on one shelf with scissors and glue, and crayons and drawing paper together on another shelf.

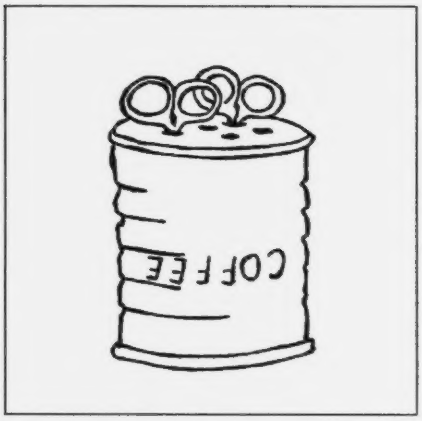

CRAYONS
SCISSORS AND PENCILS
PAPER
CLAY
SCRAPS
COLLAGE PAPER
COLLAGE FABRIC

To further enhance the display of art materials, the *Creative Curriculum* offers teachers these 10 suggestions for storing basic art supplies:

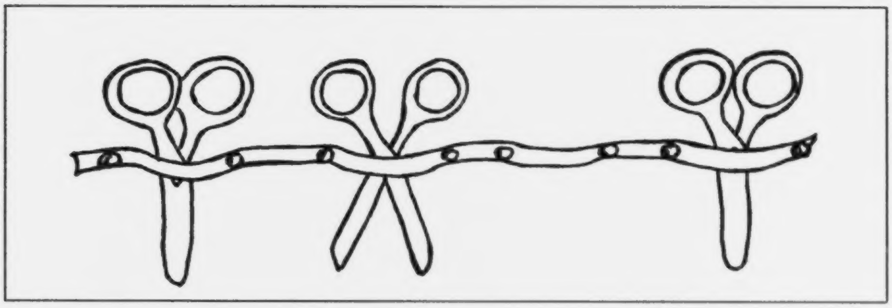


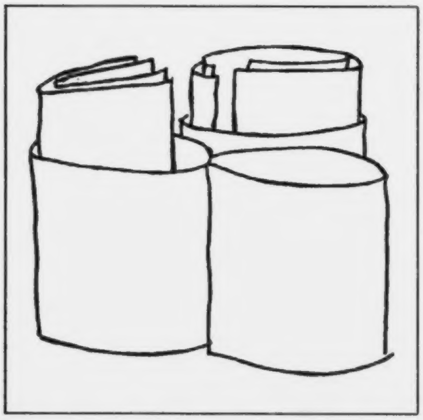
1. Egg cartons can be used for storing scissors or pencils. Tape the edges together so the carton remains closed when being carried.

2. An empty coffee can makes a good scissors holder. Glue the plastic lid to the open top because there will be jagged edges inside when the holes have been punched. Then turn the can upside down and use a can punch to make holes around the edges.



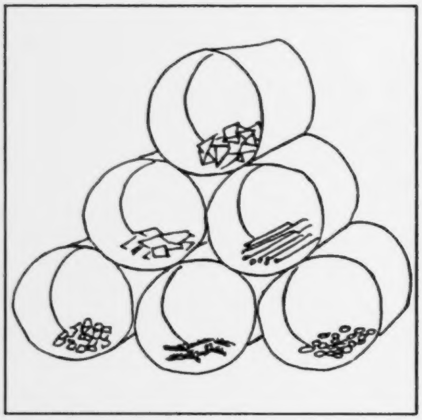
3. Another scissors holder can be made using elastic nailed to a wall or back of a cubby.

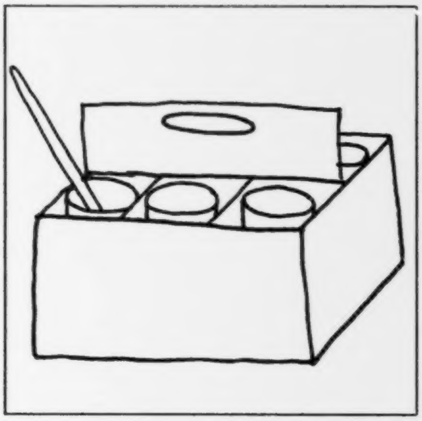




4. Ice cream containers or newspaper cylinders make good paper holders. When putting out a choice of colored paper, alternate the colors rather than stacking colors together. This makes it easier for the children to get the colors they want.

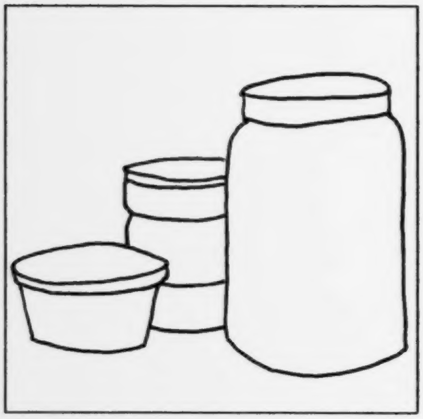
5. Ice cream containers or cylinders can also be used to store collage materials. Several containers stapled or bolted together can make a case for a variety of small art items. If the collage materials are very small, cover the bottom half of the open circle with a sheet of cardboard.

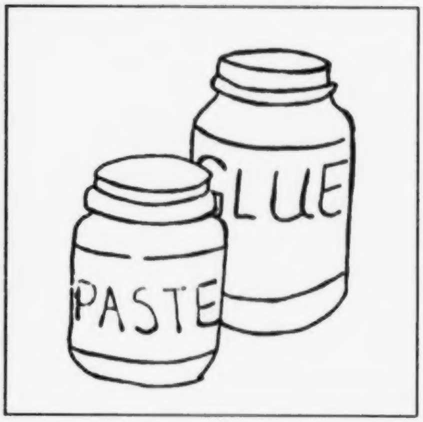




6. Paint caddies can be made using cardboard, six-pack beverage containers. Place clean orange juice containers covered with contact paper in each of the six slots. Fill each container with a different color paint. When children are ready to paint, they can pick up a paint caddy and a brush and be ready to paint, indoors or out. This is handy when easels do not have a paint drawer attached or when a wall easel is used.

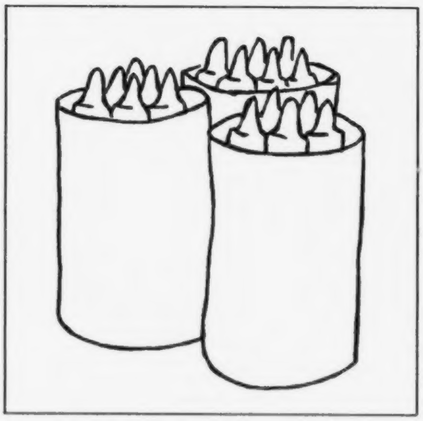
7. Clay should be kept in airtight containers, either plastic with a tight-fitting lid or metal with a plastic liner. Margarine containers, coffee cans, or gallon mayonnaise or mustard containers made of plastic all serve this purpose.

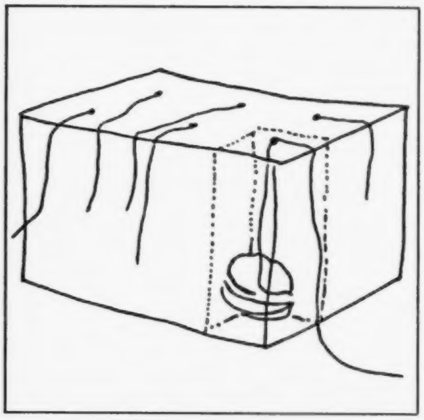




8. Baby-food jars make good glue or paste containers. It is a good idea to have enough jars on the shelf so each child can have his or her own supply.

9. Frozen juice cans make good crayon holders. Colored paper covers tell the children where each crayon goes.





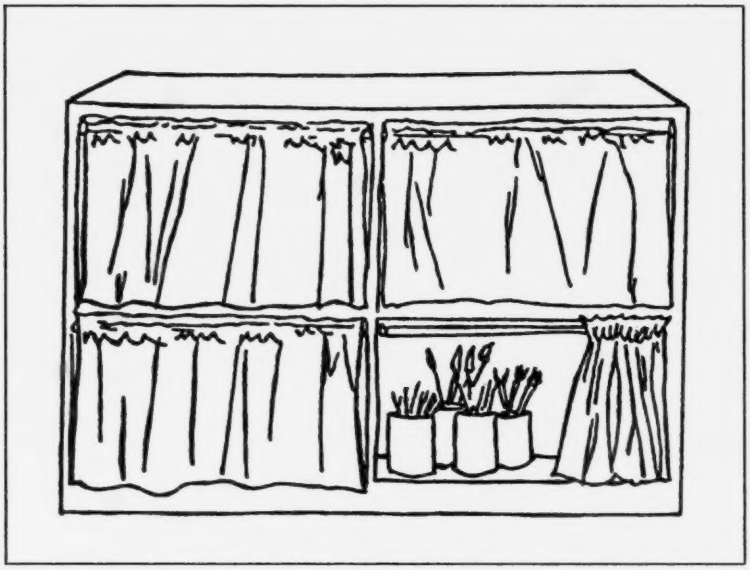
10. A yarn dispenser can be made from a cardboard box with corrugated cardboard dividers. These divided areas make convenient space for individual balls of yarn and prevent tangling. Punch a hole in the top of the box over each space and draw the yarn through for easy dispensing.

Storing Supplemental Art Supplies and Materials

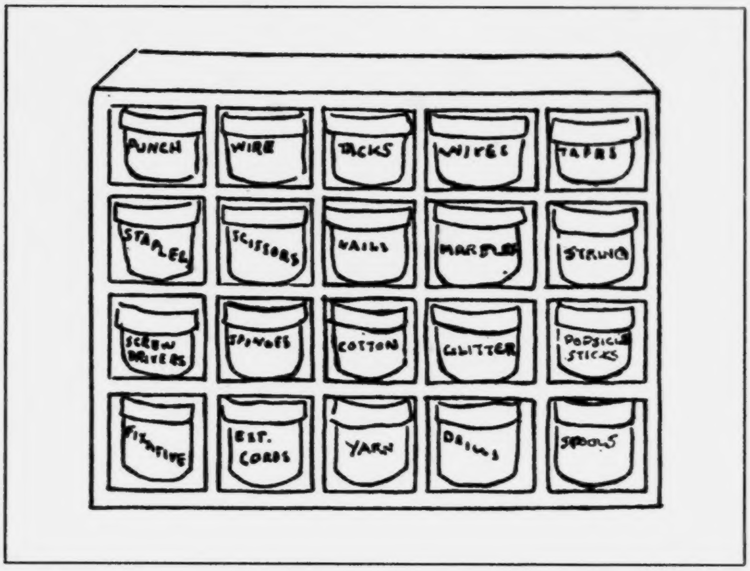
As noted earlier, the art area is greatly enhanced when supplemental art supplies are available to children. However, these materials will be more likely to enrich art experiences if they are attractively displayed and inviting to children. If scraps of materials, stones, and construction supplies are haphazardly piled together, it is more than likely that children will have no interest in using them--or possibly even the art area itself. Clutter and disorganization are overwhelming and unappealing to young children.

To effectively store and display supplemental art materials, teachers should follow these suggestions:

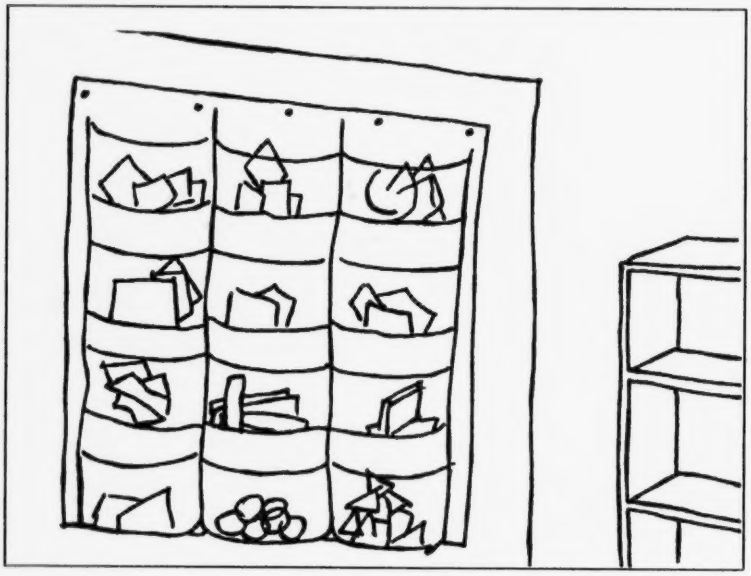
- Materials can be stored in a closet or on a high bookshelf until needed. A curtain in front of an open cupboard will close it off from the children.



- Free storage containers such as empty shoe boxes, fruit baskets, or sturdy cardboard boxes are useful for storing supplemental supplies. When they are not all the same type, the set-up illustrated below is effective.


PUNCH
WIRE
TACKS
KNIVES
TAPES
STAPLES
SCISSORS
NAILS
MARBLES
STRING
SCREW DRIVERS
SPINDLES
COTTON
GLITTER
POPSICLE STICKS
FIXATIVE
EXT. CORDS
YARN
DRILLS
SPOOLS

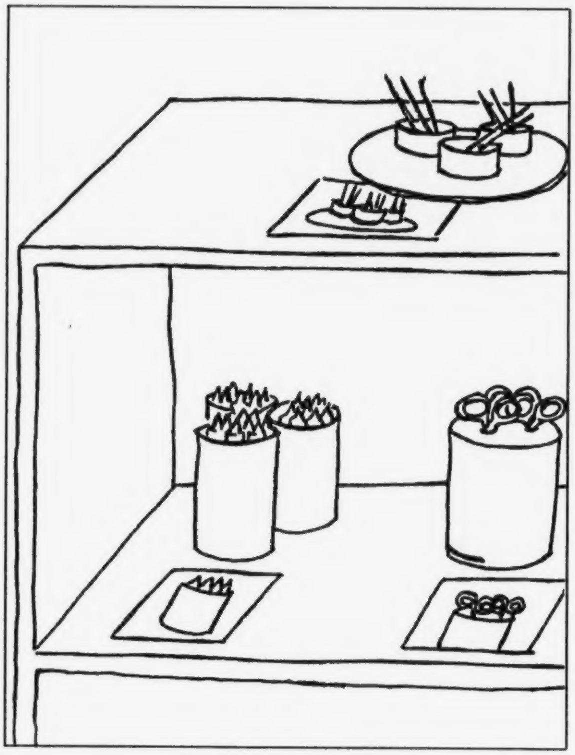
- Pockets can be useful, too. The illustration on the next page shows an easily made wall of large pockets. A sheet of plywood or tri-wall is covered with a colorful material such as burlap. By stapling plastic or acetate to it to make pockets, teachers can create storage spaces for all kinds of items.



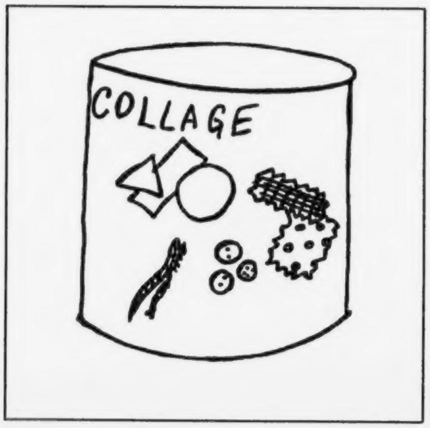
Labeling Materials

The storage of basic and supplemental materials can be enhanced by the use of labels. Labeled shelves and cubbies help children know where to find materials and where to put them back. Labeling also makes cleaning up after art activities easier.

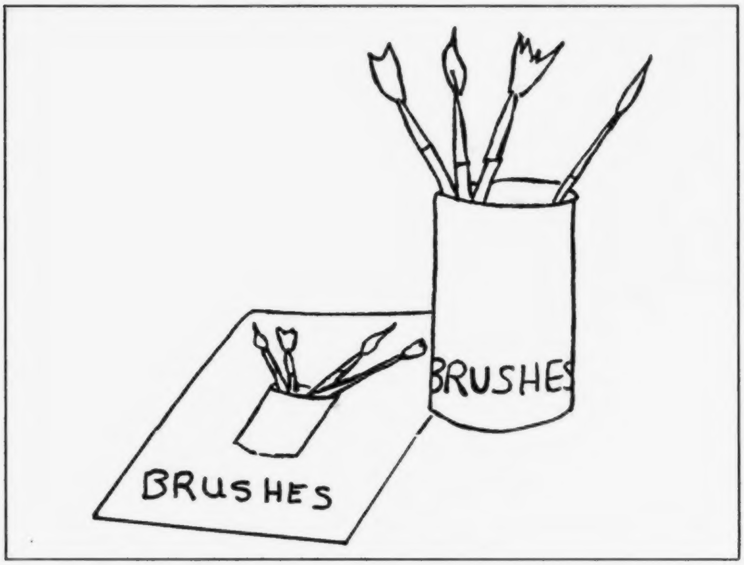
- Although there are many approaches to making labels, for the art area it is probably easiest to use drawings or photographs of objects as labels, as shown on the next page.



- Picture labels should be displayed directly on the shelf where items are to be stored. Containers used for storage could have the label attached to the outside, as illustrated below.



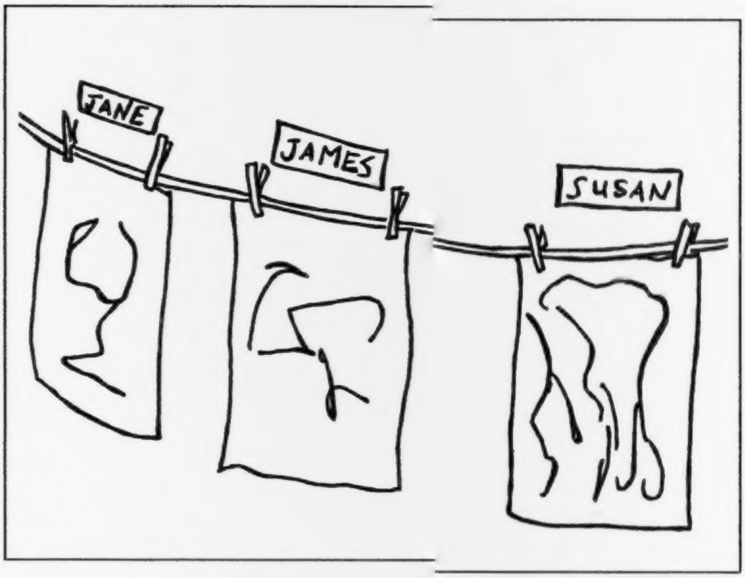
- For younger children, picture labels are recommended; older children may enjoy having the name of the object written beneath the pictures as a further means of identification.



Drying and Displaying Children's Artwork

Finding enough space to leave children's artwork to dry is a challenge even for the most experienced teacher. Few classrooms have the extra space in which to hang paintings or lay down glued collages to dry. It is important, however, to find or make such a space, because how the teacher handles children's art when it is finished says a lot to children about the value of their efforts.

One idea is to hang paintings with clothespins on a line that is high enough so that it does not interfere with other play activities yet low enough so that children can see their creations. If the clothesline is tacked loosely to a wall, the children's names can be placed at intervals along the line. Their completed artwork can then be attached by clothespins to the line beneath their names. This arrangement make it easy for children to "eye" their artwork during the day and know where to find it when they are going home.



Another idea is to use a clothes drying rack that has space for many paintings. Clothespins can be used to hang up the paintings or wet collages until they dry.

Teachers also need to find space in the classroom for drying works that cannot be hung up, such as things glued together, baked clay that has been painted, or styrofoam creations that are wet with glue or paint. Once all available shelf tops have been used, it may be possible to put these items on newspaper on the floor of a hallway or to use the tops of cubbies for additional space.

Selecting Artwork to Be Displayed

Selecting which of the multitude of creative pieces to display is often a challenge. Most teachers want to give all children in the classroom a chance to see their artwork on the walls. Too often, teachers assume responsibility for deciding which pictures to feature. Another alternative is to ask the children to make that choice. Giving children the opportunity to decide which of their many pictures they want displayed on the wall conveys a sense of respect for their judgment. It is also interesting for teachers to see what decisions a child actually makes. The child's assessment of his or her artwork may be quite different from the teacher's.

This section has offered information on creating an effective environment for children's art experiences. The following section presents strategies for extending and enriching children's learning in the art area.

IV. Interacting with Children in the Art Area: The Teacher's Role

The key to the teacher's role in the art area is providing an environment that encourages and supports children's creativity. This means several things.

- The teacher recognizes that the process, not the product, of art is most important to children. Children are encouraged to explore and manipulate materials and become familiar with them.

- The teacher offers children choices in the materials they use (e.g., paint colors, collage materials, size and type of paper) so that children can exercise their imaginations and creativity.

- The teacher values the efforts of each child and realizes that children derive different benefits from the same art experience.

The *Creative Curriculum* offers teachers a plan for accomplishing these goals. This plan focuses on three activities: observing, reacting to and reinforcing, and extending and enriching children's art play. Each is discussed in turn below.

Observing Children at Play in the Art Area

Children's ability to benefit from art activities depends on numerous factors, including the children's previous experiences with art materials, the attitudes of teachers and parents toward art, and the number of children who can comfortably use the art area at one time. To really benefit from their art experiences, children need to be able to use art materials on their own. If a teacher does the child's artwork for the child, the child gains nothing but an opportunity to watch the teacher at work. At the same time, materials that are too simple do nothing to challenge a child's creativity. It is only when materials are developmentally appropriate that learning and growing take place.

As a means of ensuring that art supplies are at an appropriate level, the teacher's best tool is that of firsthand observation. Teachers should regularly observe individual children at play in the art area and consider such questions as the following:

- Is the child able to use scissors?

- Does the child have the manual dexterity to paste a collage or hold a small paintbrush?

- At which of the four developmental stages of painting is the child?

- How does the child hold a crayon or marker?

- Are the child's crayon drawings at the same developmental stage as his or her painting?

- Does the child explore play dough or try to make creations with it?
- Does the child continue with an appropriate task for a reasonable amount of time?
- Can the child describe what he or she has done?

By observing and keeping notes on each child, teachers can assess where children are developmentally. This information will tell teachers not only how effectively each child is using art materials but also what can be done to enhance the experience.

Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Play in the Art Area

The teacher's role in the art area is to provide appropriate and inviting materials and to encourage and support children's explorations and creative ideas. Knowing what skills children have developed is important in determining the types and varieties of materials to put out at any given time.

During art activities, teachers can encourage children to try out a new material: "What do you think you could do with these pieces of felt?" Teachers can also help a child who seems reluctant to get started: "You can put on a smock if you're worried about getting paint on your new shirt." The teacher may also offer a suggestion to the child who slaps two pieces of paper on the collage and says "I'm done!" by asking, "Is there anything else you would like to add to your collage?" For those children who are unsure about how to use certain materials, teachers can provide gentle guidance: "Here is some colored chalk. What do you think will happen if you dip it in the starch?"

Most of the time, the teacher watches and talks with the children about the process of art--what they are doing, how their hands move across the paper, which colors they select. For children who have difficulty expressing themselves, a teacher can simply describe their actions: "You are moving your whole arm across the paper," "You have used all of the space on the paper," or "I see you especially liked the red paint today."

By talking with children and asking questions, teachers can use art as a time for vocabulary development (e.g., learning such words as texture, pastel, adhesives), concept development (e.g., shapes, colors, thick versus thin), and problem solving (e.g., learning about what happens if, what goes first, what if we need), as well as for artistic development and creativity. By asking open-ended questions, teachers can invite children to talk about their art, ideas, experiences, and what is most important to them.

Teachers can also initiate a group discussion about an art experience--particularly one that is a group effort, such as making a mural. The teacher might say, "Look at how many different ways you thought of to show what we saw on our walk!" or "The next time we do a mural, what else could we use instead of crayons?" These types of open-ended questions encourage children to think about what they have done and what else they might do. Such questions are also effective because they are nonjudgmental. They do not comment on how well the children did but instead focus on the process of art. These questions might focus on the following:

- what colors were used;
- how the lines go;
- how filled up the page is;
- how many different colors or strokes or collage pieces were used;
- what's the same or different from other art the same children have done before;
- how the children held or used a tool; and/or
- what happened when the children tried something new or special.

When teachers comment on or ask about the process, this sends important messages to the children:

- The teacher is looking carefully at their individual art.
- The teacher is really interested in their efforts and therefore in the children themselves.
- Children are encouraged to look closely at their own work.
- Children's self-confidence and sense of competence are promoted.

Teachers can further reinforce children's art experiences by encouraging them to describe those experiences. Because so much of children's art is experimentation--seeing what mixed colors look like or how water affects clay--teachers are helping children when they urge them to review and think through the processes undertaken.

When presented with a painting of lines and squiggles, most adults are tempted to ask children, "What is this a picture of?" But as pointed out in Section I, young preschool children are rarely capable of representational art. A question that asks what something is, therefore, is probably meaningless. Children are better served when adults ask such questions as "would you like to tell me *how* you did this?" or "what did you enjoy about doing this?" These questions encourage children to talk about their creations in terms that have meaning to them.

In summary, when talking with children to reinforce their artwork, teachers should avoid the following:

- using general words such as "pretty," "great," or "lovely";
- asking children "what is it?"; and
- telling children what the teacher thinks their paintings or drawings represent.

Rather, teachers should do the following:

- Ask children about the process: "How did you do that?" "What part did you enjoy most?" "Did your hand go round and round to make these circles?"

- Ask open-ended questions that encourage children to think and respond: "What are some ways you could fill up this paper?" "What would happen if you mixed these two colors together?" "How is this collage different from the first one you made?" "What are some different ways to make these stick together?"

- Use words to encourage and support the children's efforts: "You made a lot of paintings today. Which one should we hang up on the wall?" "You spent all morning playing with the clay; you worked hard today."

Extending and Enriching Children's Experiences in the Art Area

The basic goal for children in the art area is to independently experiment and explore the materials and to express their own ideas and thoughts through art materials. Sometimes, though, children need assistance from the teacher in extending their art play. They may be unaware of the capabilities of supplemental materials, or they may be locked into repetitious behavior that is becoming boring.

At these times it is helpful for teachers to introduce activities that will expand children's creativity. Intervention of this sort does not mean that teachers should step in and take over the art area. Rather, it entails exposing children to new ideas and materials and providing them with enough guidance to enable them to explore on their own and experience success.

Many teachers wonder if coloring books, dittos, and pre-cut models are appropriate methods for enhancing children's art play. These materials are *not* appropriate in the *Creative Curriculum*. They leave no room for imagination, experimentation, individuality, or discovery. Moreover, they prove frustrating to many three-, four-, and five-year-olds who do not have the manual dexterity or the eye-hand coordination to stay within the lines, to cut along the lines, or to reproduce a model made by an adult.

When children are given coloring books rather than pieces of paper on which to draw, they receive a subtle but powerful message: "We don't think you can draw things of your own design." Coloring books inhibit creativity because they provide the child with few choices. They actually can have an adverse effect on a child's self-image if the child is unable to stay within the lines or follow the model. Coloring books can make such a child feel like a failure.

Some teachers believe that using a coloring book or cutting out a pre-drawn pattern is good for developing fine motor skills. However, there are many other, more developmentally appropriate ways for children to develop these skills in art--for instance, by cutting out their own collage pieces or learning to use glue, tape, a stapler, or a hole punch. When children have developed the eye-hand coordination and dexterity to cut something out, they will begin to do so themselves, given the opportunity. For example, when magazines are included in the art area, children begin by tearing out pictures they like. Later, they crudely cut out the pictures, and still later they may cut them out more precisely and paste them onto a collage.

Instead of coloring books and dittos, the *Creative Curriculum* suggests that teachers rely on activities that allow children to be creative and individualistic in their art play. To identify the types of activities that facilitate artistic development, teachers can consult numerous reference books. Any of the activities listed below can be used by teachers to extend and enrich children's art play. All these activities have proved to be effective in many early childhood programs. Teachers are encouraged to supplement this list with ideas of their own. The important point to consider in developing a program is that art activities should be selected only if they match the developmental abilities and interests of the children in the class.

Painting Experiences

By combining different types of paints, papers, and tools for painting, teachers can offer children new experiences.

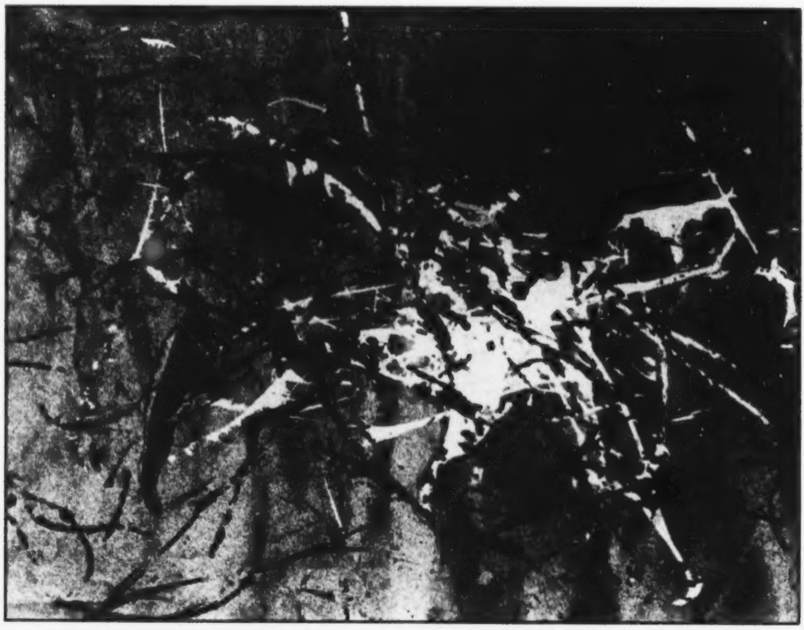
- **Exploring texture.** Provide paper, tempera paint, and brushes. Put out the following in separate containers: sawdust, sand, salt, and powdered tempera. Allow the children to experiment with what these substances do to the paint and paper. They can add a substance to the paint beforehand, sprinkle it on the paper and paint over it, or sprinkle it on afterward. When talking about this exploration, encourage children to experiment with "what happens if...?"

- **Exploring color.** Provide primary-colored paint (either finger paint or tempera). While the children are painting, add a container of white paint. Observe the children's reactions as they mix white and colored paint to create pastels. Encourage children to try mixing other colors to see what happens.

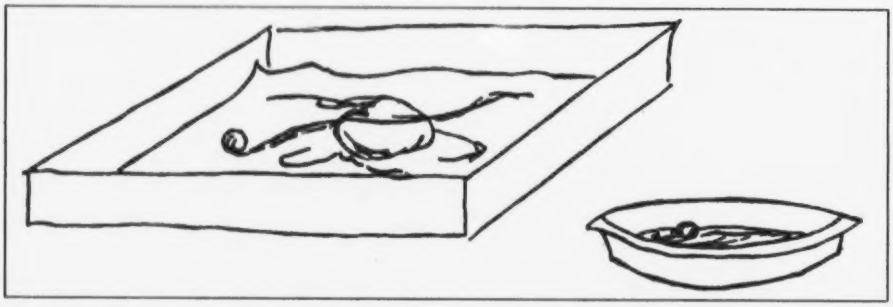
- **Using different types of tools.** Children can also paint with the following:

  rollers,
  whisk brooms,
  straws,
  marbles,
  plastic dispenser bottles (that can be squeezed),
  sponges cut into various shapes,
  vegetables such as potatoes cut into shapes to make a stamp,
  corks, or
  string.

To use these painting tools, children will need a flat, wide, paint container. As an example, a tin-foil pie plate can be lined with moistened paper towels and a small amount of paint poured in. The children can then dip the roller or string into the paint and move it around on the paper in a variety of ways. For printing, the children can dip the sponge or stamp into the paint and press it on the paper.



For marble pictures, put a sheet of blank paper inside a shallow open box to keep the marble confined. The child can then roll a marble in a pie plate of paint, put the marble in the open box, and move the box to make the marble roll. Different colors can be tried on the same piece of paper. These experiences are good for eye-hand coordination and allow for experiments with lines and motion.



Children can also "paint" with a straw by dripping the paint onto the paper with a brush and then blowing it around with a straw to make a pattern.

Printing with Body Parts

Physical contact helps make experiences meaningful to young children. A fun way to introduce printing is to have the children make prints with parts of their bodies. They enjoy the physical involvement, and the activity can increase body awareness.

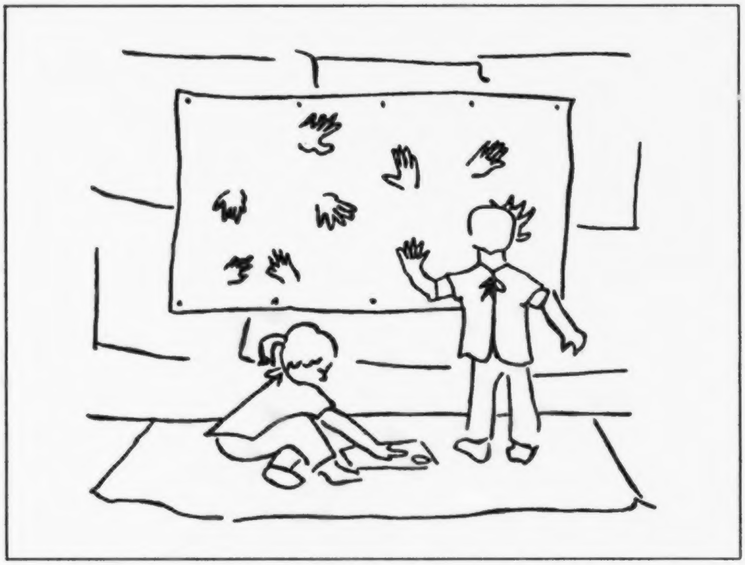
To introduce printing with body parts, teachers might read *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. The children can try printing with their bodies and making angles in the snow on a snowy day. Or, they can make footprints barefoot with water outdoors on a hot day; or with washable paint on a long piece of brown paper. (When removing shoes, be sure that children put their shoes in their cubbies so that they can easily find them later.)

A handprint mural can be done indoors in the art area or outside on the ground or on a fence. Materials needed include the following:

- a washable work surface;
- one, two, or three colors of finger paint;
- a large (about 2' x 3') piece of solid color paper tacked to the wall--brown wrapping paper works well; and
- a bucket of warm water nearby for washing hands.

Step 1: Have the children put a blob of one color on the table or surface. Let them move the paint around. Ask the children how it feels, what it smells like, and so on.

Step 2: When they seem ready, invite the children to come up and make a handprint on the paper.

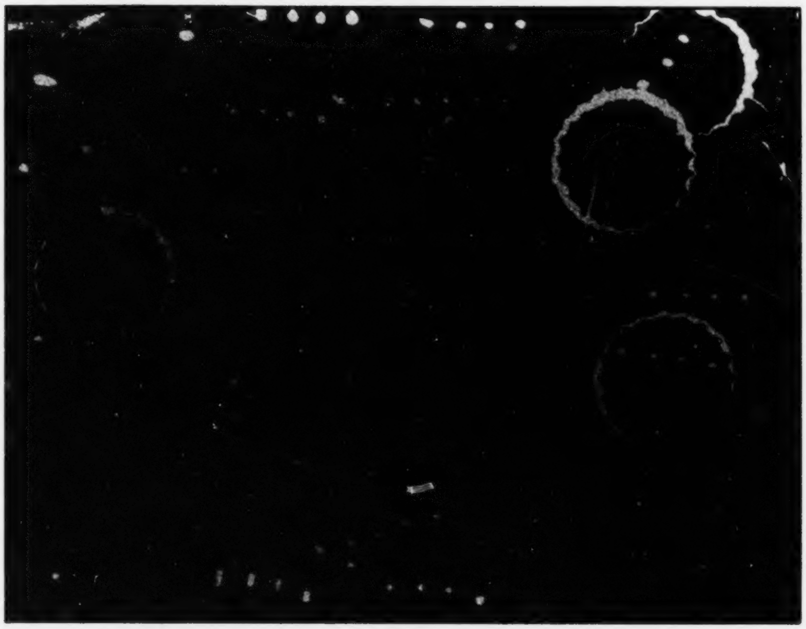


Children will enjoy talking about the mural. Teachers might do the following, to extend the experience:

- Talk about how everyone cooperated to make the mural.
- Note how each handprint is different. Children like to identify their own prints. Teachers can label handprints with names or photographs.
- Have each child put his or her hand over someone else's handprint (to teach concepts of bigger and smaller).
- Point out that some prints go up, down, or to one side or the other (to teach directionality).
- Have children point their hands in the directions of the different prints (to teach directionality and enhance motor control).
- Note how many hands there are in each color--are there more red hands or more blue hands?

Making Etchings

Another fun and easy printing activity is to scratch a picture into a printing block and take a print from it. In this activity children become real printers making etchings.



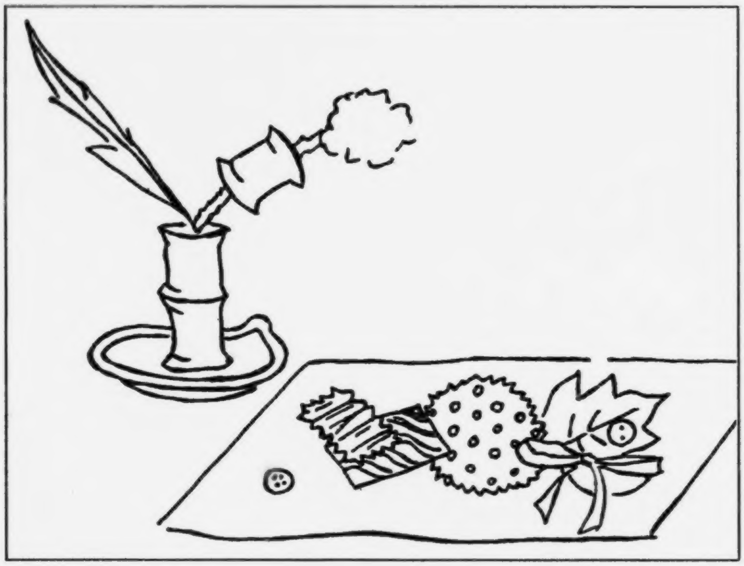
Materials needed include the following:

- styrofoam meat trays;
- scratching tools such as a nail, fork, soda bottle cap, or old ballpoint pen (look for items that are sharp enough to make cuts but not too sharp, so that children can handle them safely);
- paint and a small paint roller; and
- paper at least as large as the meat trays.

Give each child a meat tray. Let the children cut, scratch, or gouge a design into the tray. Have the children roll paint over the design as if they were inking it. Lay paper onto the design and lift off.

Creating Collages and Assemblages

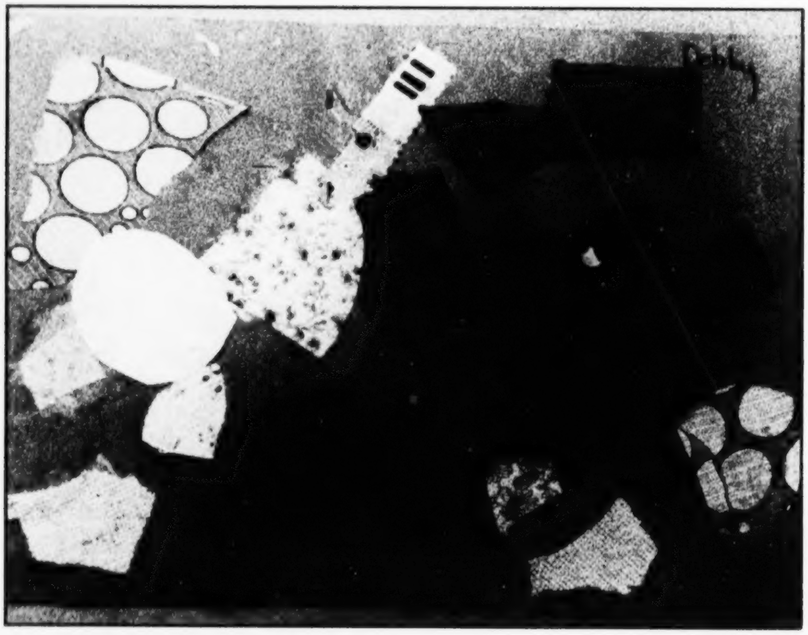
"Collage" comes from the French word "colle," meaning paste or glue. It refers to the pasting of all kinds of things onto a flat surface. An "assemblage," also a French word, is a three-dimensional piece made by putting various things together.



Assemblages and collages are wonderful opportunities for creative expression. When children are offered a variety of materials, each child creates something original. New creations can be made by adding materials such as fabric scraps, ribbon, wood scraps, styrofoam, or feathers.

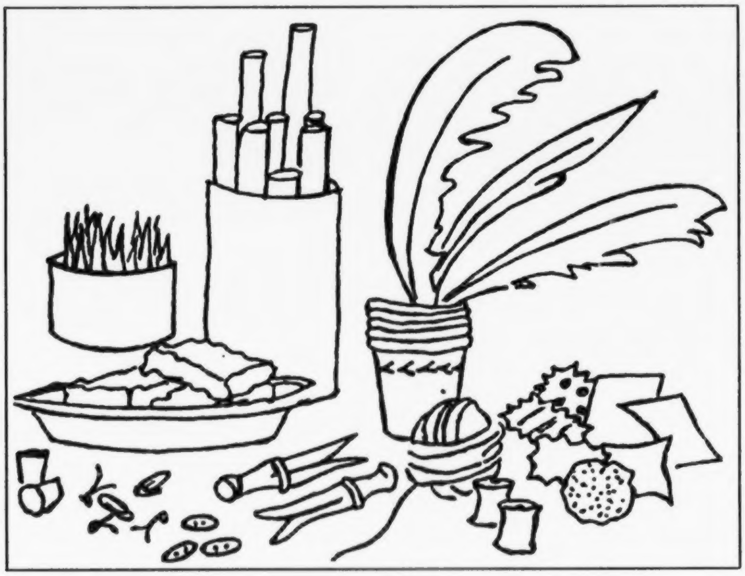
When children are first introduced to collages and assemblages, they need time to experiment with the materials, explore the different textures, and try out ways of attaching one material to another. The teacher should put out paper, a random assortment of materials, and something to use to attach the materials to each other. Both white paste and glue can be offered at first; children will quickly discover that paste works when attaching paper to paper, but glue is needed to hold wood scraps together or to attach pieces of felt to cardboard. After the initial experimenting, most children find that glue is preferable because it holds together better.

Glue can be watered down (half glue/half water) to make a kind of starch. This mixture is good for fabric or yarn collages. Children can put the fabric into the mixture, place it on the surface (cardboard), and let it dry in that form.



Collages can be created on a variety of papers, including cardboard, heavy corrugated paper, or construction paper and posterboard. Newsprint is not recommended because it is too thin. Computer paper can be used as long as the children are just attaching paper scraps.

After the children have had many experiences with this process, scissors can be added and the children can cut pieces of paper or thin materials, such as wallpaper samples or ribbon, to the size and shape they want.



Creating Puppets

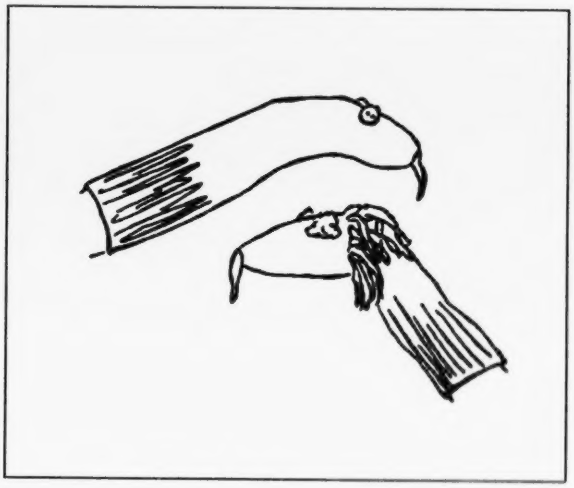
Puppets are not only fun to create but also very useful for developing body awareness, language concepts, and spatial relationships. Puppets naturally lend themselves to imaginative dramatic play. Even children who don't talk very much will often become very verbal when their puppet is "talking."

There are many ways to make puppets, and children enjoy creating them throughout the year. Two of the more popular types of puppets are sock collage and newspaper puppets. These are described below.

Sock Collage Puppets

Materials needed for these puppets include old, odd socks of different colors and different lengths, scraps of assorted fabrics, scissors, and glue. To create the puppets, place the materials in one pile and the socks in another. Invite children to pick a sock; cut and glue on features such as nose, eyes, and mouth; and put a hand inside and pretend.

Young three- and even four-year-olds probably won't be able to cut shapes that look like eyes or even get the eyes in the right place. Their puppets will be three-dimensional counterparts of their scribble pictures. But the puppets will be faces to them, and they will enjoy making them "talk" just the same. The teacher can use the experience as a chance to talk with children about "how many eyes we have," noting that "everyone has two eyes" and asking questions such as these: "Where are people's eyes?" "What else do people have on their faces?"



Yarn or string can be added to make hair and fabric scraps to make clothes, thus creating a puppet with a body as well as a face. This is a chance to offer different textures--silks, velvets--and different patterns. The individual fabric choices will make the puppets seem very different. Buttons can be glued on for some features.

Sock puppets can be animals as well as people. One favorite is dragons--the eyes go on top and a tongue goes in front. Old gloves or lunch-sized paper bags can be used as well as socks. Faces can be drawn or painted onto a glove or bag. Both can be decorated with material scraps and buttons.

Newspaper Puppets

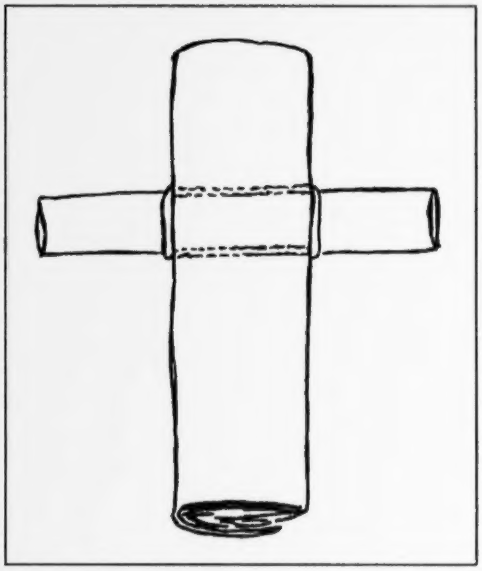
Materials needed for these puppets include newspaper, sturdy rubber bands, crayons, pens, buttons, fabric, and fasteners to make features and clothes. Creating these puppets is a four-step process.

Step 1: Take a section of newspaper and fold it in thirds.

Step 2: Take a sheet of newspaper and roll it up.

Step 3: Put the rolled sheet across the folded section to make "arms." Secure the puppet's arms with a rubber band.

Step 4: Decorate the puppet.



To prepare for this activity, it is best to put the newspaper ahead of time. Each child should be given a puppet and encouraged to use the materials on the table for features and clothing. Try to provide a variety of materials in different colors for the clothes.

Older children will know what to do if the teacher just says "let's make puppets." For younger children, the teacher can start by talking through the puppet: "Hello, I'm a puppet. Gee, I think I need something on my face. What do I need? What do faces have?" This helps get the children started without showing them a finished model to follow. They are free to use their own imaginations. When they are done, have a discussion about how different each puppet is: "Let's look at what we made. Just like we are all different, the puppets we made are different."

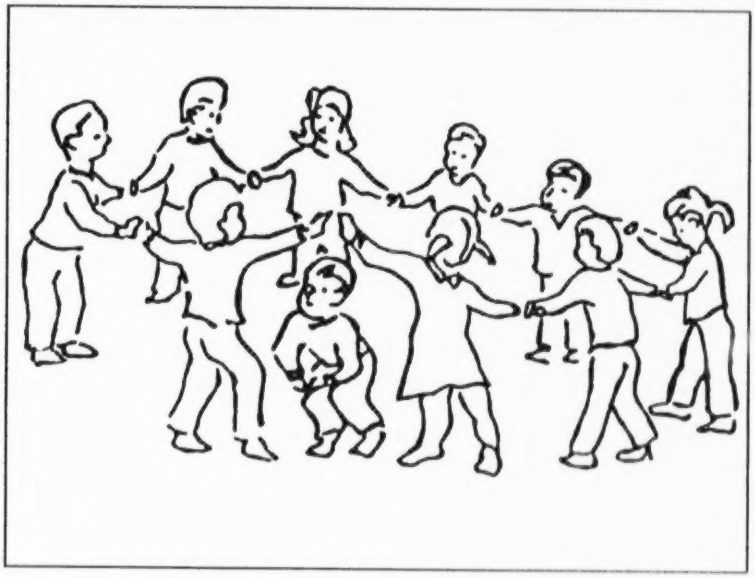
Weaving Experiences

Weaving is a challenging task and therefore most appropriate for older preschoolers. Because children are very physically oriented and conscious of what they can do with their bodies, weaving can be introduced through a variety of games, including these:

- **In and out the window**. The children stand in a circle holding hands. One child is chosen to be "It." "It" goes around the circle under each pair of arms, alternating going into and out the circle. Everyone sings:

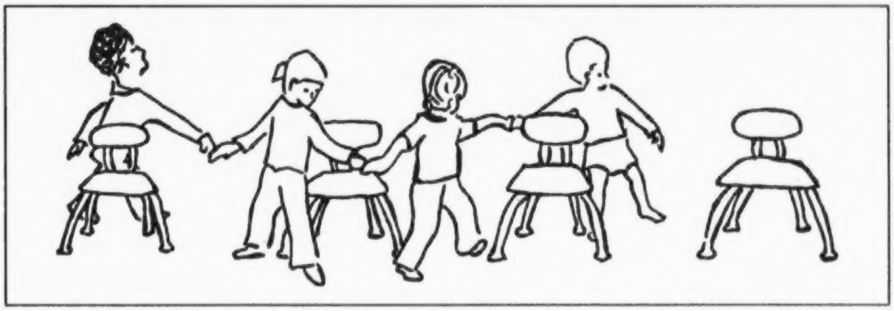
  Go in and out the window (3 times)
  As we have done before.

  Now go and pick a partner (3 times)
  As we have done before.



  "It" then chooses someone to be "It" next. The game is repeated until each child has had a chance to go in and out of the circle. Point out to the children that they have been weaving with their bodies.

- **A line game.** Line six chairs in a row with space in between them. Have everyone join hands and play follow the leader with the teacher as leader. Weave in and out of the chairs. The human chain is like the threaded needle used in weaving. Point out the connection to the weaving experience in the art area by saying, "We are weaving with our bodies. See how we are going in and out."



Materials Needed for Weaving

Children need materials they can easily manipulate. To encourage creativity, teachers should give children choices in the materials they select. To start, children will need something to weave on, such as

- chicken wire, which comes in two sizes (those of a puzzle board with large holes or small holes);
- weaving mesh, which can be found in a school supply store (mesh vegetable bags are also available in some supermarkets);
- scraps of pegboard;
- green plastic berry containers; or
- styrofoam trays with holes punched in.

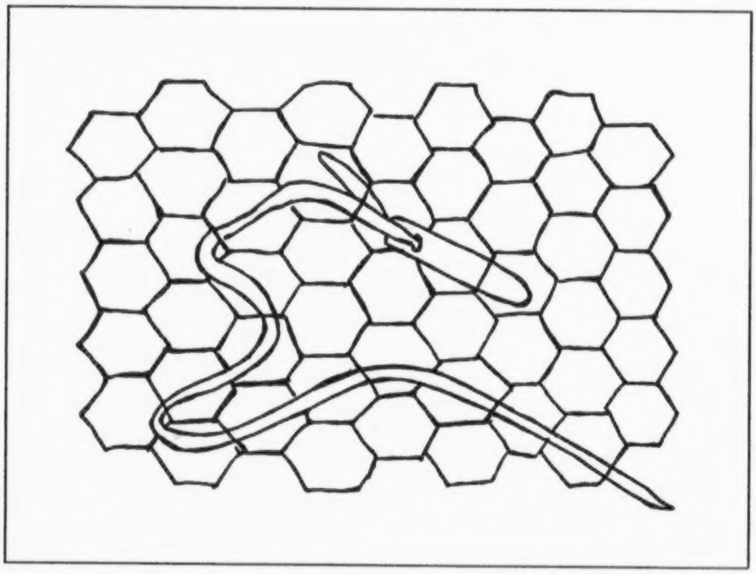
If chicken wire is used, cut the wire to fold the sharp ends down and cover them with duct tape or heavy masking tape. Once made, the wire mats are reusable. The large holes in chicken wire make weaving easier for the younger children. It is a good idea to have both large-holed and small-holed wire available in a five-year-olds' class.

Children will also need something to weave with, such as

- pipe cleaners,
- straws,
- yarns (rug weight or heavier is best),

- ribbon,
- twine,
- wire (with the ends taped),
- florist wire, or
- toothpicks.

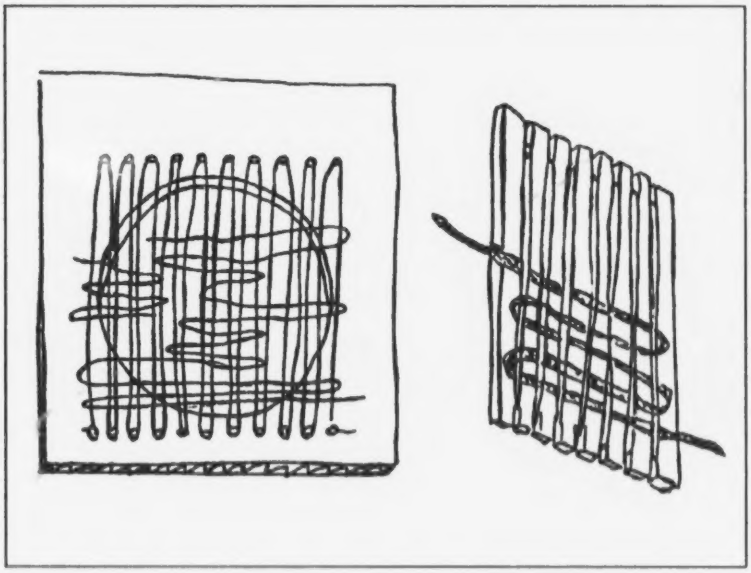
Finally, children will need tools for weaving. When children first begin to weave, they may not be ready to use a needle. Yarn can be used by making the end into its own needle. To do this, wrap the end of the yarn in tape or dip the end of the yarn in Elmer's glue and let it dry hard. It becomes like a shoelace. Some other weaving materials are stiff enough to use without a needle (wire, pipe cleaners). For children working on large-holed mesh, a tongue depressor with a hole in it makes a needle that is easy to handle. After the children have had experience with taped yarn and tongue depressors, and as they start to use smaller-holed materials, they will be ready for needles. Plastic needles with large holes are sold in knitting and embroidery stores.



Children need lots of time to explore the materials and to experiment with the process of weaving. Provide an assortment of materials for them to use. Encourage children to pick something to weave with and on. If they want to try several different materials in the same weaving, let them do so.

Teachers find that weaving is an extremely relaxing and satisfying process for young children. Adults who enjoy sewing or knitting can easily see why. Weaving is an individual process that can be continued for a number of days if the child is enjoying it. Weaving can be worked on, put away for a while, and taken out again at another time. It can be a calming process, similar to water play, for children.

There are also ways to make weaving a group experience for the entire class. A large loom can be created out of wood or tri-wall. Once the loom is made, any child can weave a row with any material (e.g., yarn, ribbon, shelves, paper) that will go in and out of the warp strands (the threads that run lengthwise on the loom).



Leave the loom up in the classroom and let the children add to it all year long--a ribbon from a birthday present, straws from a visit to a restaurant; anything that can fit between the strands can be woven in. The loom will become a history of the class and can be used to start discussions of "remember where Tommy found this velvet ribbon?" or "remember when Lisa brought this pipe cleaner from home?" or "remember when Peter's shoelace broke and he wove the broken piece in our loom?" The loom can become a group effort with special meaning to the children.

Stitchery

Stitchery is a process similar to weaving; children use a needle, or yarn made into a needle, to go in and out of material. They can also learn to stitch or sew one material to another.

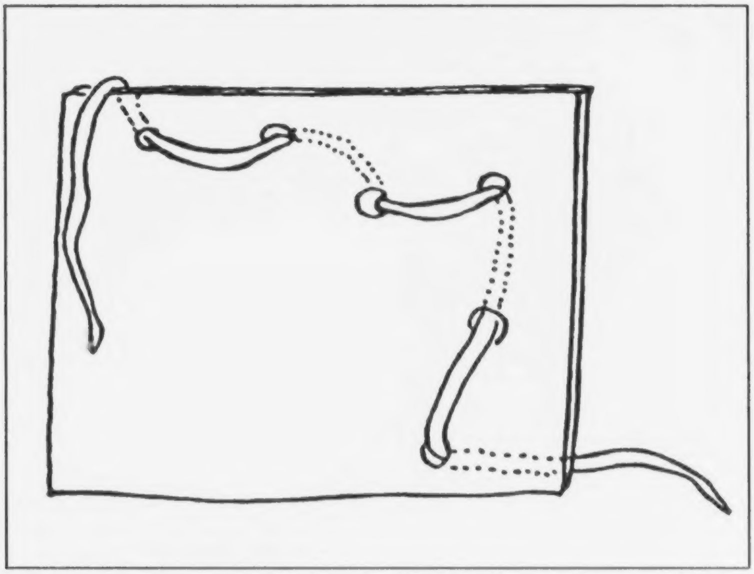
Materials recommended to stitch on include the following:

- tag board (cut into the size of a puzzle);
- burlap (stapled to a frame made of wood, cardboard, or styrofoam, or cut into the size of a puzzle); and
- styrofoam trays.

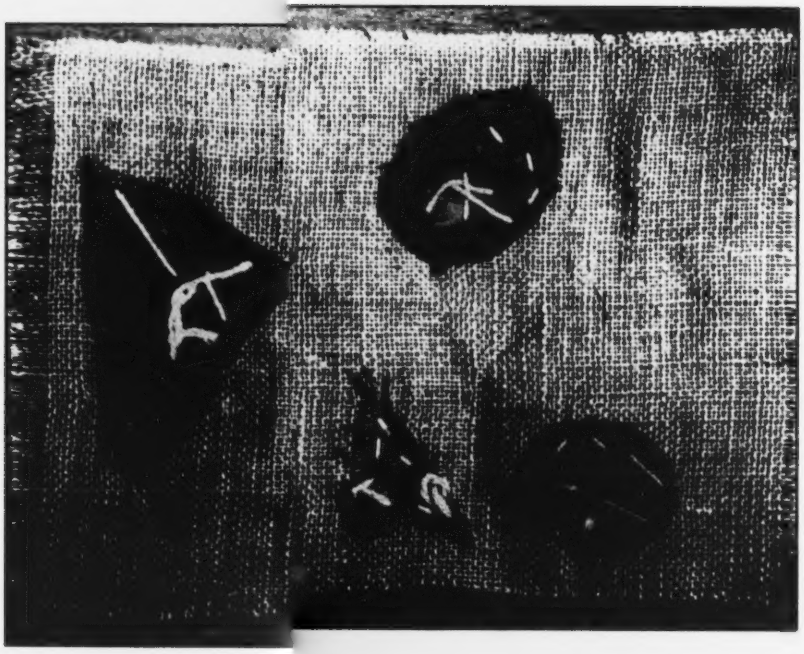
Paper is not recommended for stitchery because it tears easily. Heavy-duty cardboard will also work, as will buckram.

Children can readily be introduced to stitchery by being provided with materials to stitch on and with and allowed to choose what they like. With time, a hole punch can be provided so they can create a series of holes to sew through. Most children are fascinated with the hole punch. Just finding out how to punch holes where they are wanted builds children's understanding of spatial relations and develops eye-hand coordination.

Most beginners will punch holes around the edge of the cardboard and stitch overhand or in and out, or a combination of both.



Later on, older children (four- and five-year-olds) may use the hole punch to create specific patterns they want to follow.



A Word About Holidays

Holidays present a challenge to preschool teachers. A holiday is often a time when teachers want to decorate the classroom or have the children make gifts to bring home to family members. There may be pressure from parents to receive specific things from the children that the teachers are expected to help prepare. When teachers are committed to a creative art program in which children use materials in different ways without adult direction, holidays are sometimes a problem.

It is important to remember that artwork is a means for creative self-expression and that no two pieces of children's art will look the same. Explaining this to parents at the start of the year and again at holiday times will help reinforce the value of art play as a process and as a means of addressing children's needs to express themselves as individuals.

There are many ways to integrate art with holiday festivities and create gifts to bring home and decorations for the room. Consider the following examples:

- **Mother's or Father's Day.** Trace the children's bodies on large pieces of butcher paper or brown wrapping paper. Provide crayons or paint and let the children decorate themselves any way they like (some may make faces, others clothes; still others will paint everything one color). On the back, let each child individually dictate a story about the parent. The teacher can say "Tell me about your Mom" or "What do you want to say to your Daddy?" These paper figures make wonderful gifts and meet all the criteria of creative art.

- **Music drawings.** Play music associated with a holiday and have the children draw pictures to the music. These pictures can decorate the classroom and lead to a discussion of what the holiday means to the children.

- **Halloween and Valentine's Day**. Put pieces of orange paper cut like a pumpkin, or red or pink paper cut like a heart, on the easel. The children can paint anything on them.

- **Photos as decoration**. Prepare foods in class that are associated with a holiday. Have a "feast" and ask one of the parents to take pictures. The teacher can then mount the pictures on paper frames that have been cut from drawings made by the children for this purpose. The framed pictures can then serve as decorations.

It is helpful to keep the holidays in perspective and remember what is important to the children. In spring, introducing white paint to create pastels may be far more interesting and important to a group of three-year-olds than painstakingly (and unsuccessfully) cutting out pre-drawn pictures of baby chicks. Ask the children for ideas of things to create for the holidays and display in the room. A group mural using seasonal materials is always appropriate--for instance, a fall mural that is a collage of leaves, sticks, and acorns can take the place of an entire bulletin board full of look-alike turkeys or pumpkins.

Almost anything a child creates in art can be given to a parent as a gift or used to decorate the classroom. Parents can receive marble paintings or string collages, and both can decorate a classroom wall.

Taken together, all these art-related activities should provide teachers with a framework for extending children's art play. In implementing any or all of these activities, teachers should let children be as independent as possible. Children need to be reassured that there are no right or wrong approaches to art play: whatever they feel like creating is the right thing to do. Afterward, as before, teachers should talk to children about what they have done, concentrating on the process undertaken. With guidance, children can encounter exciting techniques that will allow their imaginations to run free.

Scheduling Art Activities

Daily art activities are an important part of the preschool program. Some activities can be done independently by children during free play and do not require special scheduling by the teacher. These activities include the following:

- easel painting;

- drawing with crayons or markers or chalk;

- creating collages with paste or glue and a variety of materials;

- cutting or tearing paper or magazines; and

- using clay or play dough.

Other activities--such as finger painting, using plaster of Paris, making collages, constructing puppets, or doing stitchery--require supervision by the teacher. For these latter activities, planning is crucial. Materials need to be ordered ahead of time to make sure that there are enough supplies for each child. Enough time has to be allotted to ensure that children will not be rushed. Sometimes an art experience can continue for several days. If the children are obviously enjoying the materials, or if only two or three children can use them at one time, a teacher-planned experience might continue throughout the week. At the same time, children would be free to choose drawing, painting, collages, clay, and play dough on their own.

There are times, too, when an individual child becomes engrossed in an art experience. It is important for teachers to be sensitive to each child's need and pick up on cues about the importance of their art play. If indicated, it may be possible for one or two children to continue their art while the rest of the children move on to the next part of the schedule. The children can be told that "Anne really needs some more time with her painting today." This tells Anne that her need for more time is appreciated and tells the other children that they, too, can have more time when they need it. On a day when several children have been involved with an art activity, such as making puppets, the experience might move in an unplanned way by having the children put on a puppet show. Adhering to a schedule is not as important as prolonging children's enthusiasm for their artistic activities.

This section has discussed ways for teachers to enhance and extend children's art play using diverse media. The next section looks at the parents' role in supporting children's growth and development through art play.

V. Supporting Children's Art Play: The Parent's Role

One of the strongest philosophical beliefs underlying the *Creative Curriculum* is that the child's preschool experience is enhanced when it is supported at home. Most parents realize that their children love art, and most parents give their children crayons and paper on which to draw. Yet although they realize that their children enjoy this activity, a great many parents are unaware of the ways in which art experiences promote physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive growth.

Teachers thus can perform a valuable service by sharing information with parents on the relationship of art play and learning. By helping parents to appreciate the stages of growth in children's art and the value of art experiences, parents will be better able to support and value the child's involvement in art activities.

Planning a Parent Workshop on Children's Art

One effective way to capture parental support is to plan an art workshop. The goal of this workshop would be to provide art materials for parents to use and to discuss with them the process and value of art for young children. The following suggestions may be useful in planning such a workshop.

- Before the workshop, prepare a one-page written summary for parents describing the value of art, based on information presented in Sections I and II of this module.
- Select several different types of art media for the parents to try: for example, a collage, a type of painting, clay or play dough, and crayons and paper for drawing.
- As the parents come into the workshop, invite them to use the materials and create something to bring home for their child.
- As parents use the materials, interact with them as with children, commenting on the process and asking open-ended questions.
- When the parents are finished, use their art as the starting point for a discussion on the value and role of art in an early childhood classroom.
- Emphasize the importance of the process; ask parents to describe how they felt when they were using the materials.
- Show a film that describes the role of art, such as the one on the *Creative Curriculum*.

- Conduct a follow-up discussion on the value of children's art, based on the parent's conclusions.
- Plan a workshop prior to major holidays to share the program's philosophy about holiday-related art. (See the discussion on holidays in the previous section.)

Some parents may find it helpful to have an outside expert, such as an art teacher or art therapist, address the parents. By hearing an expert opinion, some parents can verify their own discoveries about art.

Encouraging Art at Home

When parents see the value of art experiences for their child, most want to expand their child's experiences beyond the realm of crayons. Teachers can help parents do this by providing ideas for home art activities. Plans for making puppets, creating collages, and doing stitchery can be prepared by parents on the basis of the ideas presented in Section IV. Teachers may want to include these ideas in a newsletter or periodically send idea sheets home with children.

When helping parents encourage their children's art play, teachers should remember to share with parents certain basic principles for room arrangement that will facilitate their play. For instance, teachers can suggest that parents do the following:

- Designate a drawer in the kitchen or living room as an art drawer, or use a bookshelf or sturdy cardboard box that can be kept in the child's closet.
- In this space include crayons, marking pens, paper, a pair of scissors, and a separate box with collage materials.
- Let the child know where in the house materials can be used--at the kitchen table, at a small child-sized table, on the kitchen floor, outside, or elsewhere.
- Be sure that the space for art in the house is one that can be easily cleaned, that is, not on a rug or couch but on a surface that can be washed. Children need to concentrate on their art without worrying about making a mess.
- Once the child knows where to work, the child should be encouraged to take out the art materials and use them independently at any time.
- Designate a place to display art; for example, use magnets on the refrigerator, a wall in the child's room, or a spot in the kitchen where art can be hung.

Teachers can also enlist parental support in collecting supplemental objects for the art area. Parents can be encouraged to take their children on walks to gather leaves, pine cones, flowers, feathers, and other natural materials that might be used in art projects.

By working together, teachers and parents can strengthen children's growth through art. The natural excitement children have when engaged in art play can be extended when parents and teachers join forces to support children's creativity.

VI. For Further Reading on Children's Art

Bits and Pieces-Imaginative Uses for Children's Leanring. Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1967.

Bland, Jane. *Art of the Young Child, 3-5 Years*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1957 (distributed by Simon and Schuster).

Bos, Beverly. *Don't Move the Muffin Tins*. Roseville, CA: Turn-The-Page Press, 1982.

Brittain, W. L. *Creativity, Art, and the Young Child*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979.

Cherry, Clare. *Creative Art for the Developing Child: A Teacher's Handbook for Early Childhood Education*. Belmont, CA: Fearon, 1972.

Cole, Ann, Carolyn Haas, Faith Bushnell, and Betty Weinhergen. *I Saw A Purple Cow and 100 Other Recipies for Learning*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972.

Cole, Natalie. *Children's Art from Deep Down Inside*. New York: John Day Co., 1966.

Croft, Doreen, and Robert D. Hess. *An Activities Handbook for Teachers of Young Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

Flemming, Bonnie, Mack, Darlene Softley Hamilton, and JoAnne Deal Hicks. *Resources for Creative Teaching in Early Childhood Education*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977.

Kellogg, Rhoda, and Scott O'Dell. *The Psychology of Children's Art*. San Diego, CA: CRM-Random House, Inc., 1967.

Kellogg, Rhoda. *Analyzing Children's Art*. Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1970.

Langstaff, Nancy. *Exploring with Clay*. Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1979.

Lasky, Lila, and Rose Mukerji. *Art: Basic for Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1980.

Lowenthal, Viktor. *Creative and Mental Growth* (5th ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970.

Pile, Naomi. *Art Experiences for Young Children*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973.

Seefeldt, Carol. "Art," in *Curriculum for the Preschool-Primary Child*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1976.

Sand and Water

I. Introduction to Sand and Water: Philosophy and Theory

What Are Sand and Water Play and Why Are They Important? 251
Developmental Stages of Sand and Water Play 251

II. Children at Play in the Sand and Water Area: Goals and Objectives 253

Goals for Children in the Sand and Water Area 253
Learning Objectives for Sand and Water Play 254

III. Setting Up the Sand and Water Area: Planning the Environment 257

Room Arrangement Considerations 258
Setting Up the Sand and Water Area 259
Selecting Materials for the Sand and Water Area 262
Storing Materials in the Sand and Water Area 264
Caring for the Sand and Water Area 266

IV. Interacting with Children in the Sand and Water Area: The Teacher's Role 267

Observing Children's Sand and Water Play 267
Reacting to and Reinforcing What Children Do with Sand and Water 268
Extending and Enriching Children's Sand and Water Play 269

V. Supporting Children's Sand and Water Play: The Parent's Role 275

Helping Parents Appreciate the Value of Sand and Water Play 275
Encouraging Sand and Water Play at Home 276

VI. For Further Reading on Sand and Water 277

I. Introduction to Sand and Water: Philosophy and Theory

What Are Sand and Water Play and Why Are They Important?

Nearly everyone can relate with fondness to the relaxing sensations of walking barefoot on a sandy beach or soaking in a warm tub of water. Sand and water are naturally soothing substances. There is something about the sound and feel of water and the texture of sand that lures one toward relaxation. Children, like adults, are almost instinctively drawn to sand and water.

The natural attraction that children have for sand and water makes these materials perfect for the preschool classroom. Because children are already familiar with these substances and find playing with them pleasurable, opportunities for using sand and water as springboards for learning are boundless. Children have a powerful desire to explore both sand and water. Most children cannot resist feeling the refreshing coolness of water against the skin or the sensation of sifting sand through their fingers.

Children's explorations with sand and water naturally lead to learning. Sand and water play allow children to encounter principles of math and science firsthand. When they mix sand with water, they discover they have changed the properties of both: the dry sand becomes firm and the water is absorbed. The textures of both materials change, too. Unlike dry sand or liquid water, wet sand can be molded.

By playing with sand and water, children have an opportunity to develop skills in several areas. By sifting sand and scooping water, they improve their physical dexterity. By joining others in blowing bubbles or fashioning a sand castle, they develop social skills. At the same time, they enhance their cognitive skills as they explore why certain objects sink in water and others float or consider how much water should be added to sand to make it pliable. Sand and water play challenge children's minds and soothe them at the same time.

Developmental Stages of Sand and Water Play

Sand and water play are two separate but related activities. Each one on its own provides children with a host of learning opportunities. As a liquid, water can be splashed, poured, and frozen. As a dry solid, sand can be sifted, raked, and shoveled. Play with each substance separately can be used to foster children's physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive growth.

However, the *Creative Curriculum* has chosen to combine sand and water play for two reasons. First, sand and water are natural materials that are soothing and pleasurable. They encourage very similar types of explorations and learning. Second, sand play and water play are enhanced when the two are merged to form a third type of play--wet sand play. Teachers can, of course, use water play as an independent activity. Yet most teachers find that by housing the two types of play in one area, they can expand the separate benefits of both.

For the purpose of this module, therefore, sand and water play will be discussed together. However, it is important to bear in mind that children do not necessarily approach both types of play in identical ways. For example, a particular child may be more familiar with water than sand upon entering preschool. Developmentally, it can be expected that this child would be further advanced in water play than sand play. Teachers therefore need to be alert to the fact that developmental progress in each area is not always parallel, and children should be encouraged to explore each medium.

Although children do not always achieve identical levels of progress in sand and water play, they do pass through similar stages of play in both areas. The first developmental stage for both sand and water play is one of sensory-motor exploration. Here, children become familiar with the properties of the materials. What does sand feel like when it is sifted through one's fingers? What does water feel like when it is poured? What happens to water when soap is added? Do individual grains of sand disappear after being sifted through a strainer? During this stage of development, children use many of their senses to become comfortable with sand and water. As they sift, pour, poke, splash, and mix these substances, they acquire considerable information about what these materials are like and what can be done with them.

In the second developmental stage, children apply what they have learned about sand and water to a purpose. Instead of simply scooping wet sand in and out of pails, they now do this activity as a planned event. The unmolded sand structure is now a building that can be named or part of a bridge support to be built. Activity during this stage is more planned and part of a nearly endless series of experiments.

The third and final developmental stage is a refinement of the second stage. Activity becomes even more finely planned and executed. This stage is best distinguished from the preceding one in that children's activities are now less repetitious and more complex. Children experiment with building intricate moats around castles or channeling tunnels. Water play may involve dramatic elements that depend on children's imaginations. Indeed, children's activities during this stage become largely symbolic of their experiences.

Play activities in this final stage also show a higher degree of cooperation than in the earlier stages. In the first stages, children are learning by themselves about sand and water. As they become increasingly comfortable with this knowledge and begin applying what they know to their play, they like to join in shared projects. Their play, as it develops, reflects team efforts to build, to experiment, and to enjoy sand and water.

This section has presented the developmental stages of sand and water play. The next section sets forth suggested goals and objectives for children's sand and water play, which teachers can use in devising their own sand and water activities.

II. Children at Play in the Sand and Water Area: Goals and Objectives

Goals for Children in the Sand and Water Area

Sand and water play can be used to foster children's development in many areas. In particular, teachers can use these media to promote cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth. Using their knowlege of each child in the classroom, teachers can select goals such as those listed below.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To develop creativity.
- To understand cause and effect.
- To develop skills of scientific inquiry.
- To refine problem-solving skills.
- To learn basic math concepts such as volume, conservation, measuring, and comparing.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To learn to play cooperatively with others.
- To develop group social skills.
- To develop perseverance.
- To explore social roles and relationships.
- To deal with fears and problems.

Goals for Physical Development

- To strengthen fine motor control.
- To enhance eye-hand coordination.
- To refine visual discrimination.

As teachers select goals for the sand and water area, the *Creative Curriculum* urges teachers to pick those goals which fit the requirements of individual children. For instance, if a child needs practice in developing fine motor skills, teachers can separate this goal and select learning objectives to aid in its achievement. Similarly, if a child is having difficulty with eye-hand coordination, teachers can focus on this one goal during sand and water play. The choice of goals and objectives, as prescribed in the *Creative Curriculum*, is an individual one left to teachers. The only requirement is that the selections reflect the children's learning needs.

Learning Objectives for Sand and Water Play

For each goal area, teachers can choose from a wide selection of learning objectives that will help children achieve the chosen goal. For instance, if a teacher wishes to focus on fine-motor skill development as a goal, this teacher could designate objectives such as these:

- To refine fine motor skills by sifting, pouring, and shoveling sand.
- To refine fine motor skills by pouring water into containers.
- To refine fine motor skills by making mud pies, castles, and tunnels from wet sand.
- To refine fine motor skills by bathing dolls in water, washing the doll's house, and rinsing the doll's clothing.
- To refine fine motor skills by making frames for blowing bubbles from straws, wire, or plastic lids.

All these objectives will enable teachers to work on helping children attain the goal of fine-motor skill development. In deciding which and how many of these objectives to select, teachers need to take their cues from the children in the group.

- What experiences have children had playing with water? With sand?
- What types of activities do they like? Do they prefer group activities to solitary ones?
- How can the children be motivated to try new activities?

The answers to these questions will aid teachers in formulating a plan for each child's learning. The number and type of objectives targeted should therefore be a natural outgrowth of each child's interests, learning style, and developmental level in both sand and water play.

To help teachers develop individual plans, the *Creative Curriculum* offers the following list of goal-related learning objectives. Teachers are encouraged to choose those objectives which best meet children's needs. In addition, teachers are encouraged to supplement this list with their own objectives for sand and water play.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To enhance creativity through experimentations with sand, water, and mud.
- To refine understanding of cause and effect through such actions as combining sand and water, blotting water with a sponge, and adding water to other dry materials.
- To improve powers of scientific inquiry by staging experiments in which sand and water are combined to change their properties.
- To refine problem-solving skills by seeing experiments through to their conclusion.
- To acquire basic math concepts by filling and emptying measuring cups; comparing measures of sand, water, and mud; and comparing the volume of contents in one-cup, half-cup, and quarter-cup measures.
- To acquire concepts and vocabulary related to science and math by conducting experiments in which water is added to sand and containers are filled with sand, water, and wetted sand.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To use sharing skills by waiting for a turn and giving other children a turn to use sand and water play materials.
- To demonstrate an ability to work in small groups by doing projects together, such as making and selling mud pies, constructing a sand castle, blowing bubbles, and so on.
- To demonstrate perseverance by seeing a project through to completion.
- To explore roles and relationships through dramatic play centering on sand and water.
- To explore solutions to problems and fears through dramatic play related to sand and water.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To demonstrate fine motor control through such activities as pouring water, sifting, making mud pies and mud constructions, bathing dolls, and making frames for blowing bubbles.

- To use eye-hand coordination by pouring water and sand into containers, making patterns in sand and water, and making imprints in wet sand.
- To distinguish the textures and/or feel of sand, water, and mud.
- To strengthen visual discrimination through such activities as molding wet sand into different sizes and shapes, visually tracking bubbles, and patterning objects in sand.

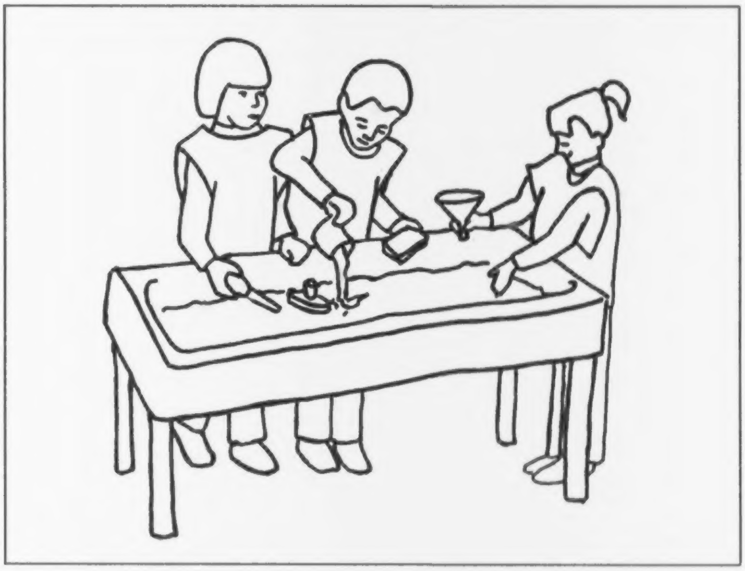
By specifying particular goals and objectives for children, teachers can meaningfully direct children's sand and water play. The following section offers suggestions for setting up a sand and water play area in which these goals and objectives can be readily achieved.

III. Setting Up the Sand and Water Area: Planning the Environment

The goals and learning objectives that a teacher chooses for children are best met when the classroom is physically arranged to promote learning. Where the sand and water area is located and how it is laid out thus have a major effect on learning that can occur through sand and water play.

Many classrooms have an area devoted to sand and water play outdoors. A covered sandbox is usually the focal part of this activity area. In the module on the outdoor environment, ideas are presented for setting up a sand and water area outdoors. In this module, attention will be focused on setting up a sand and water area in the classroom. Classroom sand and water play is recommended even for those programs with outside play areas for several important reasons:

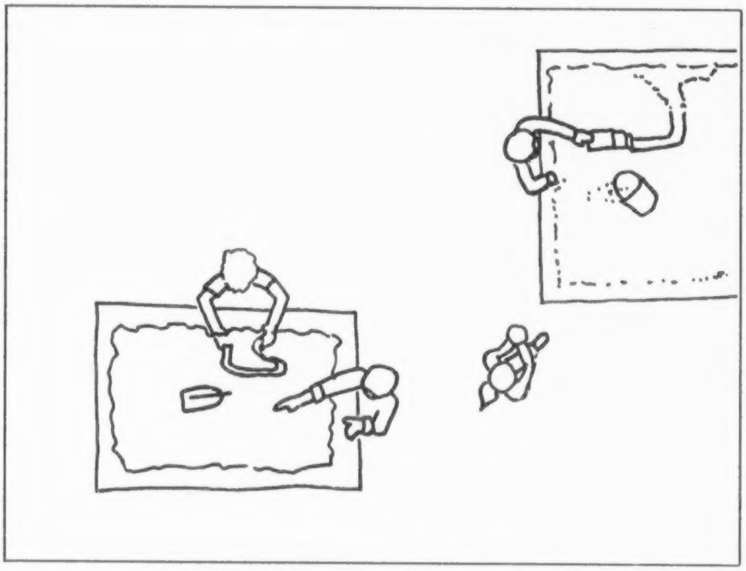
- Children enjoy and learn from sand and water play. Including this area in the classroom provides more exposure time for their activities.
- Younger children and/or children who have limited experience with sand and water play are more comfortable in a controlled indoor environment.



- Water play can usually be arranged closer to sand play in an indoor environment than in an outdoor environment. This allows teachers to more thoughtfully plan learning activities.
- Some children prefer one medium over the other; indoors, they have ready access to both.

Room Arrangement Considerations

In setting up an area in the classroom for sand and water play, it is important for teachers to create an environment in which children can concentrate on what they are doing with as few distractions as possible. The drawing below illustrates an environment that effectively does this.



As shown, two distinct areas exist--one for sand play and one for water play--yet both activities take place together. This arrangement allows children to play with sand and water independently and, when they so desire, to combine play in both areas. This arrangement is important for the following reasons:

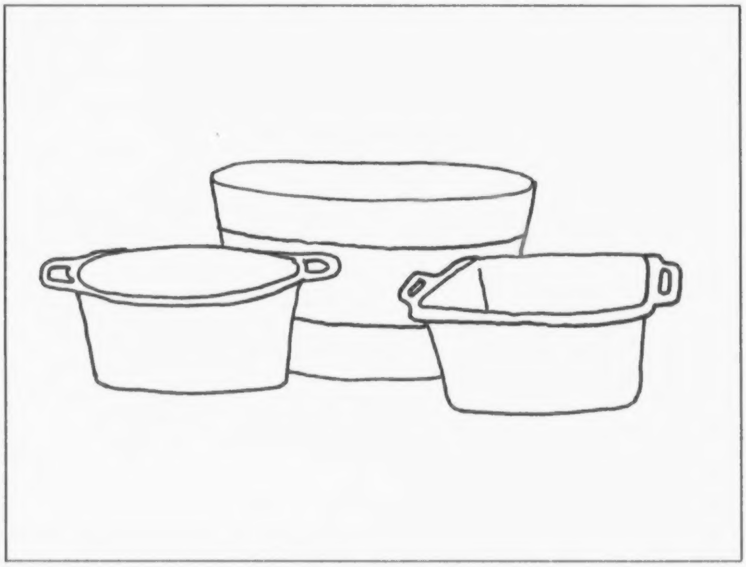
- Both sand and water are natural materials that are soothing and that encourage similar types of play.
- Some children may have a desire on particular days to do only sand or water play.
- When children want to combine sand and water play, they can do so easily with a minimum of confusion and mess.

One appropriate location for the sand and water area is near the block or house corner. These areas, like the sand and water play area, are noisy. By locating the sand and water area near other active areas, teachers can avoid disturbing children who might be looking at books or concentrating on an art activity.

It is also preferable to have the sand and water area out of the range of main traffic patterns. Since water play often leads to wet floors that can be slippery, the sand and water area should be out of bounds to other children who might come scurrying through only to slide or fall on a wet floor.

Setting Up the Sand and Water Area

Equipment for the sand and water area can be purchased through school supply catalogues or made by teachers. For teachers who wish to make their own, most sand and water play equipment can be assembled relatively easily and inexpensively. For example, two flat containers such as plastic dishwashing tubs, baby bath tubs, or cement-mixing tubs can be used to hold the sand and water. These tubs can be purchased at department stores, hardware stores, or lumber suppliers. Plastic tubs are recommended because wood warps and cracks when wet, and metal tends to deteriorate over time. If metal tubs are available for use, teachers can line them with plastic to prevent leakage and rusting.



The size of the tub selected can vary, although most teachers feel that a tub with a 20- to 25-gallon capacity is the most comfortable size for preschoolers. In addition, a depth of at least nine inches is recommended so that the tubs can be filled with a sufficient amount (e.g., four inches) of water or sand.

Typically, the sand and water tubs are placed side by side on a large work table. Underneath the table, towels, sheets, newspapers, old shower curtains, or drop cloths need to be spread to catch falling sand and absorb spilled water. The area itself needs to be large enough to give children space to move freely. Children using the sand and water tubs need space to freely use their arms and play with gusto.

The water tub should be filled daily to a height of about four inches. At the end of the day, the tub should be emptied, as water left overnight can grow bacteria. This process is easier if the water play area is located near the classroom's water source.

The sand tub should be filled with dry, finely textured sand. Bags of sterilized play sand can be purchased at lumber or building supply stores. Most teachers find that they need between 60 and 90 pounds of sand to stock this area. Dirt or coarse grain sand should not be used, as they do not hold together as well as fine grain sand and are thus difficult to mold.

It is recommended that the tub be filled only halfway with sand so that

- children have room to freely use props in the sand tub;
- the sand has a chance to dry out overnight; and
- the table does not become overloaded by the weight of the sand.

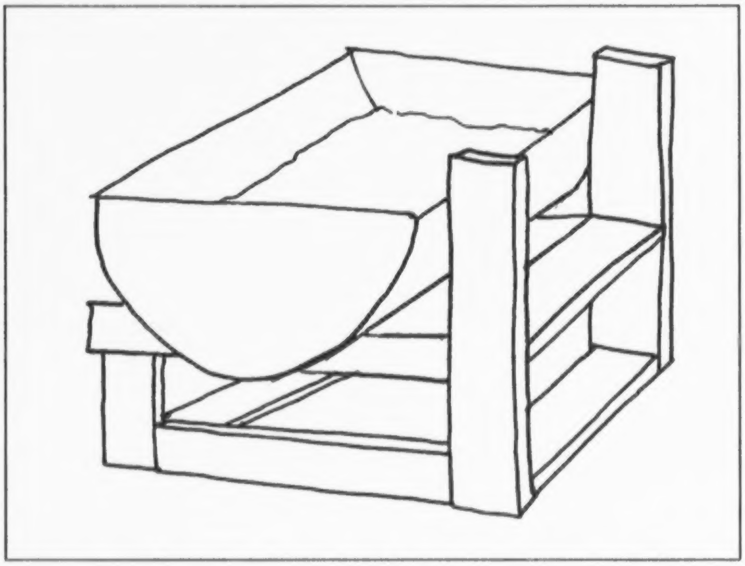
If sand is not available or if teachers wish to add variety to sand play, the following materials can be used as substitutes for sand in a tub:

- sawdust,
- beans,
- rice, and
- large wood shavings.

A word of caution must be mentioned when using food as a play material. Many parents have strong feelings about wasting food. Therefore, parents' views should be solicited before using food as a substitute for sand.

Teachers might also wish to consider two other suggestions for setting up the sand and water play area. One suggestion involves creating a larger environment; the other, a more individualized one.

Because of the relatively small size of most sand and water tubs, play in the sand and water area is of necessity limited. One or two children per tub are usually all that can use this area at one time. Typically, however, interest in playing with sand and water far exceeds the available space. To increase the number of children who can use the area at one time, some teachers opt to increase the size of the sand and water tubs.



Doing so is not always as straightforward as it may seem, however. Finding tubs with a larger capacity that are still child-sized may be difficult. One viable solution is for skilled teachers or parents to construct their own large sand and water vats using a 55-gallon drum and lumber.

With a sabre saw, the drum is cut in half lengthwise to create two tubs. The edges are then smoothed with a file or grinding stone and covered with book tape. A drum stand can then be built as in the preceding illustration or purchased directly from a hardware or metal specialty store. Before being filled, the drums should be lined with plastic to prevent rusting.

The use of drums is especially effective because they provide children with large, usable spaces for sand and water play. At the same time, their design is aesthetically inviting.

Another variation that teachers might wish to consider is the use of individual miniature sand and water trays. A dishpan makes an ideal miniature sand or water tray. These pans are not intended to be used as a substitute for the larger tub areas but as supplements to the main play activity. They are especially valuable for aesthetic experiences and for children in the beginning stages of sand and water play who may want to explore the properties of sand and water quietly on their own.The smaller trays make mastery of skills much easier for children who are unsure of themselves. They also provide an ideal environment for artistic and scientific endeavors, such as making shell patterns in sand or watching a beetle track across a smooth layer of sand.

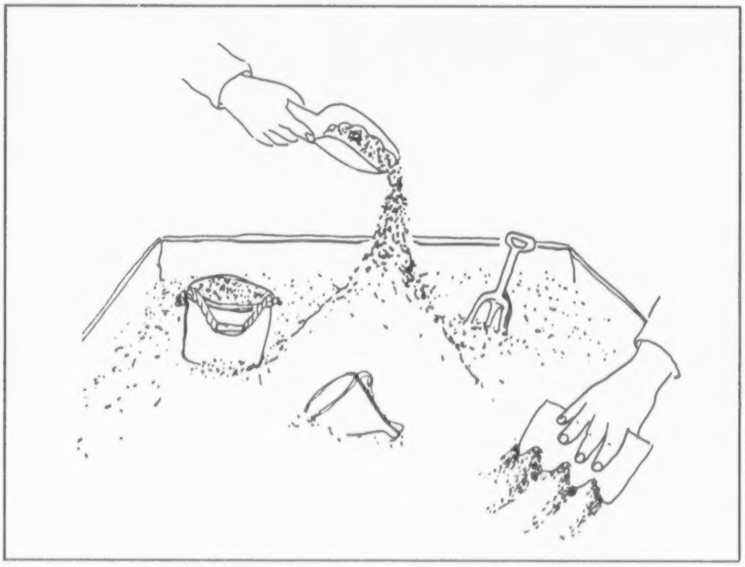
Teachers may wish to set up two of these individual trays side by side on a small table and let pairs of children play at one time. Or, if the floor is well-protected and children are more comfortable doing so, they may wish to use the trays directly on the floor.

Selecting Materials for the Sand and Water Area

When children are first introduced to sand and water, they should have ample time to explore these natural materials. Initially, children should be encouraged to explore dry sand and then wet sand with very few toys, tools, or equipment. Children need time to explore sand before they feel free to experiment with it. Similarly, children should be given an opportunity to get used to water with only a few simple props, such as plastic bottles or dolls to wash.

Gradually, though, children's play will expand when props are added. Measuring spoons and cups greatly increase the range of experiences available to children. Floating toys add other possibilities. In the sand area, digging and sifting tools likewise open up new worlds for exploration.

Props ultimately magnify the child's opportunities to learn and have fun with sand and water. Giving children access to props challenges their minds and their senses. Teachers should look for props that are versatile but not limit their selection to accessories that can be used in both areas. Wooden and metal props (other than aluminum or stainless steel) are not recommended for long-term use, as they tend to crack or rust. However, if a prop is special and will contribute to children's play, it should be included, with the understanding that it may have to be replaced.



The following props are suggested for use with sand or water or when the two are combined.

Props for Sand Play

Muffin tins
Cookie cutters
Seashells
Feathers
Colanders
Sifters
Combs
Shovels
Molds
Small cars and trucks
Dump trucks
Sticks and seeds
Rolling pins
Rakes
Whisk brooms

Props for Water Play

Paint brushes
Spray bottles
Food coloring
Siphons
Water wheels
Boats
Troughs
Squeeze bottles
Egg beaters
Whisks
Soap: liquid, solid, flaked
Vegetable dyes
Plastic straws
Plastic tubing
Eyedroppers
Corks
Sponges
Bubble-blowing materials (paper, straws, solution, etc.)

Props for Both Sand and Water Play

Clear marbles or magnifying glass

Pebbles and rocks

String

Funnels

Pots and pans

Buckets and bowls

Scales

Measuring cups

Scoops

Small containers

Strainers of different sizes

Ladles

Sieves

Nesting cups

Pitchers

Storing Materials in the Sand and Water Area

In arranging storage, two basic rules should serve as guideposts:

1. Materials should be accessible to children so they can independently take what they need when they want it.

2. Sand and water toys should be stored separately whenever possible--not in an effort to differentiate between props but in order to keep sand out of water props.

The key to storing props is to keep the area attractive and uncluttered. Children are most likely to use props when they look appealing and are easy to get at.

Some general ideas for storing props follow.

- Place props at children's eye level so they can readily see what is available.

- A pegboard with hooks on it can be used to store many of the kitchen-related items used in sand and water play, such as ladles, sieves, measuring cups, and so forth.

- Narrow drawers can be used to hold collectible props such as seashells.

- To maximize storage, heavy plastic dish bins can be used to hold props. They are especially recommended for props used in water play that may be put away still damp. Or props can be hung in nylon fruit bags to air dry.

- Props can be grouped in boxes or tubs by function, such as filling, pouring, floating, or measuring. To illustrate, a bubble-blowing box might contain the following:

  bubble solution;

  bubble pipes;

  plastic berry boxes;

  plastic straws;

  pipe cleaners, toothpicks, and plasticine clay to make bubble frames;

  sponges;

  styrofoam cups; and

  small containers (plastic/metal) opened at both ends.

To make the storage and retrieval of materials in the sand and water area easier for children, labels are recommended. By either drawing a picture or using a photograph, teachers can show children where each prop is stored. This approach is especially useful for illustrating those items stored in bins or boxes or on collectible shelves. By looking at the picture of all props stored in a particular bin, children can readily tell if a prop they want is in that bin without wading through its contents. This saves the child frustration and cuts back on mess.

For young children, picture labels at eye level are most appropriate. Older children, however, may like having the name of the prop posted along with its picture. In either instance, it is suggested that labels be covered with clear contact paper to protect them from water, sand, and dirty fingers.

In addition to the storage of props, the sand and water area needs to have space devoted to clean-up materials. A broom, dustpan, mop, and paper towels need to be easily accessed for daily clean-up. Labels here, too, will make it easier for children to use and return these materials in an orderly fashion.

Finally, some teachers like to keep waterproof aprons for children in this interest area. These may be stored either on hooks in the area or (if individual aprons are available) in the children's cubbies. If the aprons are stored in the sand and water area, teachers may wish to put picture labels of them above the hooks on which they are stored.

Caring for the Sand and Water Area

Care of this interest area is simple and straightforward. Yet because the area is prone to messiness, care must be ongoing. First, materials need to be periodically checked for cracks and rusting. Any cracked or rusted equipment should be immediately replaced.

Clean-up needs to be supervised daily. Water cannot be allowed to stand overnight for health reasons. All surfaces, including tables, tubs, and floors, need to be mopped regularly so that no one slides, trips, or falls. Children should be alerted to the following two basic rules of safety as well:

1. Water should not be squirted or splashed outside the tub, and sand should not be thrown.

2. Sand and water play should be limited to this one area.

By following these simple procedures, most teachers find that the sand and water area operates smoothly. Children love playing here. As this section has indicated, when the area is arranged to maximize their enjoyment, children can learn more. The next section discusses the teacher's role in using the sand and water environment to actively promote learning.

IV. Interacting with Children in the Sand and Water Area: The Teacher's Role

As we have seen, in the *Creative Curriculum* the teacher's role is to facilitate learning. By observing children, talking to them about what they are doing, reacting to and reinforcing their accomplishments, and asking open-ended questions, teachers can extend and enrich children's sand and water play experiences.

Observing Children's Sand and Water Play

The first step for teachers using an environmentally based curriculum is to observe children at play. Through ongoing observations, teachers gain vital information on what each child does, the type of activities that child chooses, and the successes and frustrations the child experiences while at play. This type of information in time allows teachers to plan activities that ensure each child's developmental progress.

There are two accepted approaches to conducting observations of children in the sand and water area:

- following an individual child through the entire time spent in the sand and water area, or
- observing all children in the sand and water area for 10-15 minutes for several consecutive days.

Both methods provide teachers with a profile of what children are doing during sand and water play. To ensure that the observed incidents are not forgotten, teachers should jot down their observations, as they are being made, on note cards. This procedure also provides teachers with a log of children's progress that will be useful for planning appropriate activities and discussing progress with parents.

In making observations, teachers should note developmental happenings such as these:

- Do children explore materials or experiment with them?
- Do they play alone or cooperatively with other children?
- Do they keep at a task out of interest or because they are unable to proceed further?
- Do they problem-solve or repeat previously learned tasks?
- How do they answer cause-and-effect questions?

By looking carefully at the materials children select and noting what they do with these materials, teachers can gain important insights into children's developmental progress.

Reacting to and Reinforcing What Children Do with Sand and Water

Learning where children are developmentally enables teachers to interact with each child to extend learning. One of the best ways of doing this is to reinforce children's activities and discoveries by talking to children about what they are doing. This approach is recommended for the following reasons:

- It helps children become aware of what they are doing and why.
- It gives children the message that their activities are important and appreciated.
- It helps children increase their vocabularies and reasoning skills.
- It provides teachers with further data on children's developmental progress.

When talking with children, teachers should first ask them to describe what they are doing. For children who are reluctant to express themselves, teachers can ask questions such as these:

- "How does it sound?"
- "Do they look the same?"
- "What would happen if...?"
- "How much do you think will fit...?"
- "What else could you...?"
- "Do you know what this is called?"

In addition, by asking open-ended questions such as the ones given below, teachers can further encourage children to describe what they are doing and to think about what else they might do.

- "Tell me about what you made."
- "Why do you think the mud pies didn't hold their shape?"
- "You really made that water wheel go fast. How could you make it turn slowly?"
- "I see you're trying to pour the sand into that little opening. What could you use to get the sand in the bottle without spilling it?"
- "What could we use these shells for in the sand tub?"

The process of reacting to and reinforcing a child's play allows teachers to guide that child's learning while permitting the child to take the lead.

Extending and Enriching Children's Sand and Water Play

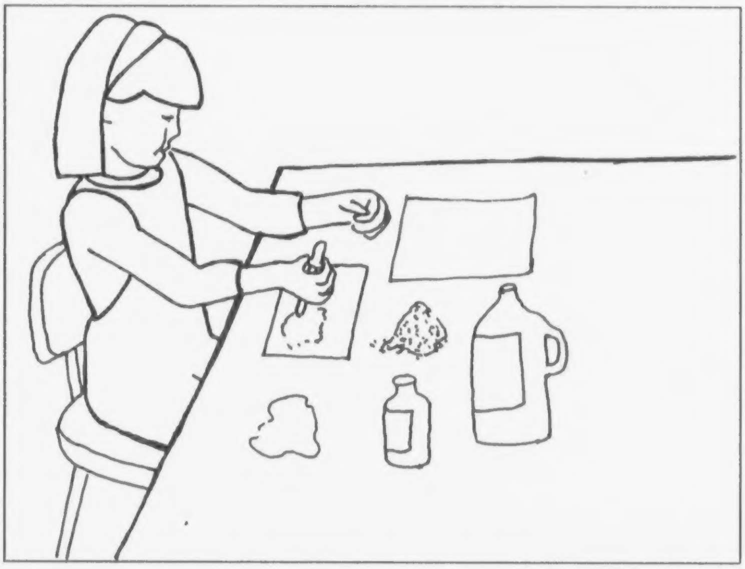
Through thoughtful and ongoing reinforcement, teachers can help extend children's sand and water play activities. For those children who appear to be stuck at a particular level or for those who are reluctant to participate in sand and water activities, it is very important that teachers know when and how to intervene. Intervention as used here is not interference; rather, it is a natural extension of learning, rooted in observation and reinforcement. As used in the *Creative Curriculum*, intervention in the sand and water area means

- starting with basic props and observing children's play to see when new props are needed (e.g., when children are experimenting with how to fill a bottle, a funnel can be introduced);
- presenting materials to children sequentially (e.g., first dry sand and then wet; first clear water and later colored water or soapy water); and
- providing raw materials children may need for experiments:
    - different surfaces they can pour water on, such as wax paper, a blotter, a sponge, or plastic;
    - objects that will sink or float;
    - a series of cans with holes punched in them so children can see how long it takes for the different cans to empty; and/or
    - materials that are proportional, such as measuring or nesting cups.

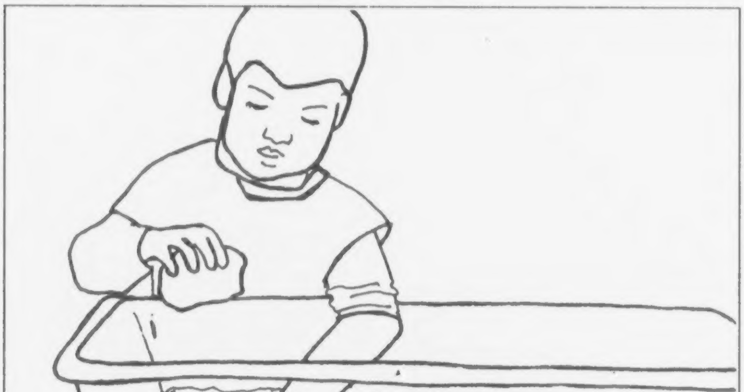
Using strategies such as these, the teacher helps to create an environment in which children are encouraged to experiment on their own. The child still takes the lead in learning; the teacher's role is to ensure that learning takes place.

In working with children in the sand and water play area, teachers can design a number of activities for enriching children's learning, including these:

- **Discovering what happpens when water is added to other materials.** Teachers can assemble a variety of substances, such as a blotter, salt, jello crystals, paper, sand, a sponge, and so on. Children can then use a medicine dropper to gradually moisten these materials. As these materials become wet, teachers can ask questions to encourage children to describe what it is they see and what they think is happening. Teachers can follow up this activity with a discussion of what actually takes place when each material is made wet.



- **Discovering what floats in water and what sinks.** For this activity, teachers can bring to the water tub a number of objects that float (e.g., a piece of wood, a plastic bottle with a tight cap, a leaf, an acorn) and a number of objects that don't float (e.g., a paper clip, a nail, clay, washers, a stone). Children can take turns placing each object into the water and noting whether each floats. Further experimentation should be encouraged: What happens if an



object that floats is held under water and then released? What happens if a floating object such as wood is weighted down with nonfloating objects such as stones?

- **Blowing bubbles with a variety of frames.** Most children love to blow bubbles. Teachers can readily introduce this activity into water play by providing materials to make the bubble solution and frames for blowing. A good water-to-soap ratio for bubbles is eight tablespoons of dishwashing detergent to one quart of water. In most cases, liquid detergents work best. To produce longer lasting bubbles, corn syrup, gelatin crystals, liquid pectin, or glycerine can be added to the bubble solution. With the teacher's guidance, children can construct a variety of frames for blowing bubbles, such as:

  empty eyeglass frames,

  coat hangers or electrical wire fashioned into shapes,

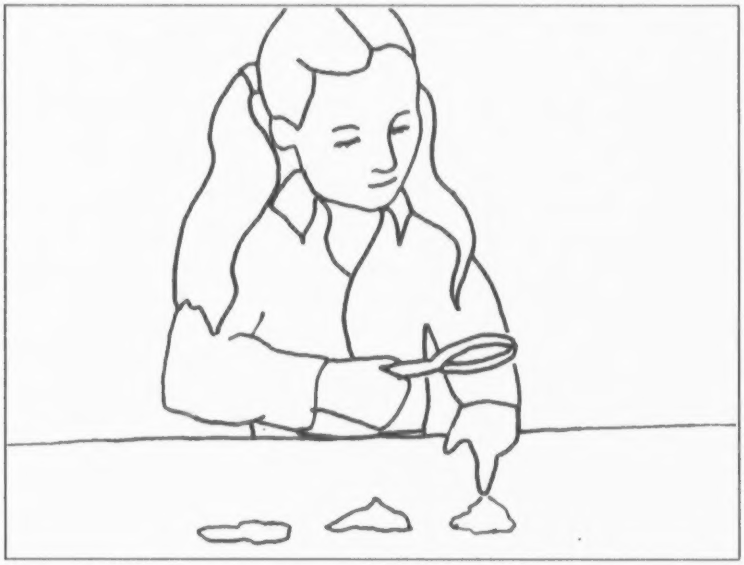
  plastic lids of margarine or coffee containers cut into shapes, or

  plastic berry boxes.

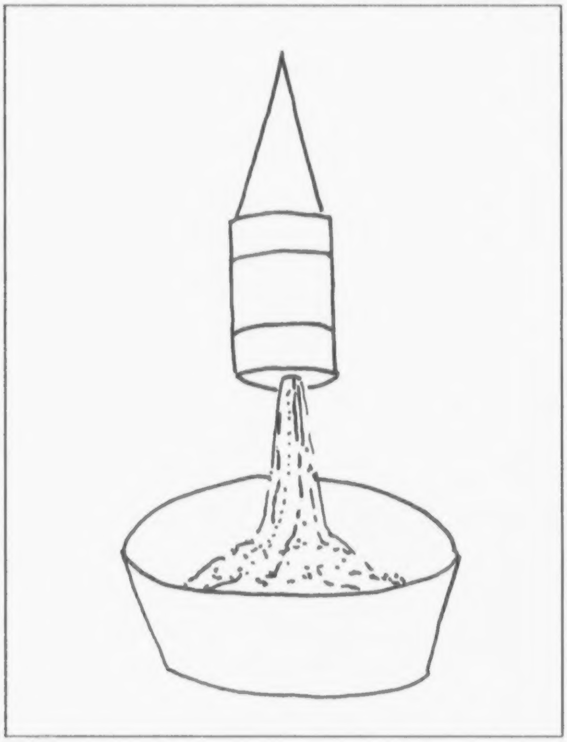
  Children can dip frames into the bubble solution and blow bubbles or move the frames swiftly through the air so that the soap film slips through the frame, thus forming a bubble. Children will learn on their own that bubble blowing works best if the frames and hands are wet at all times; dry surfaces cause bubbles to burst.

- **Discovering what happens when water freezes.** Most children already know about two states of water--liquid and solid. They may not realize, though, that frozen water expands. If the preschool has access to a freezer, this principle can be demonstrated by filling a plastic baby's bottle to the brim with water and placing the bottle in the freezer until the water hardens. The children should be asked to describe what happened to the water when it freezes.

- **Observing sand closely.** If they can use a microscope or magnifying glass, most children delight in observing sand up close. Children can compare how sand under the microscope differs from sand viewed with the human eye. A clear marble can also serve as a magnifying glass. Alternatively, a water lens can be constructed using a clear plastic bottle filled with water.

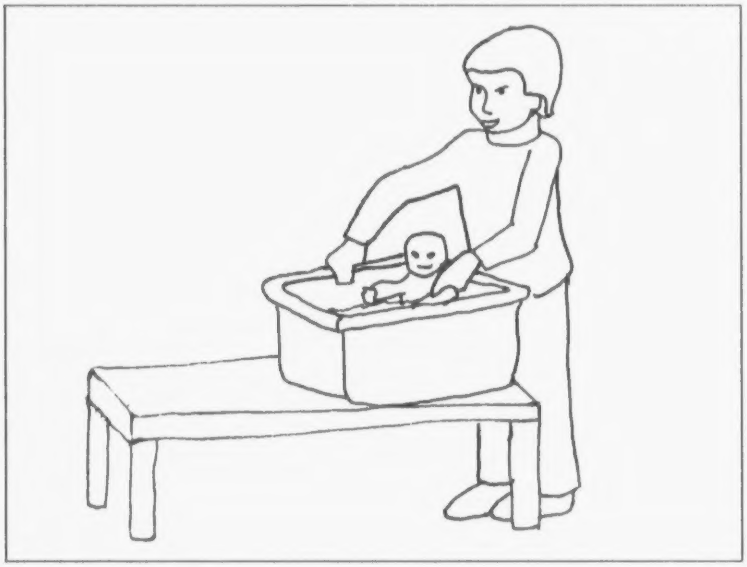


- **Using sand to tell time.** Children can construct a timer similar to that used in many board games by using a can, string, and sand. A small hole should be punched into the bottom of the can and three additional holes punched at the top of the can. String should be threaded through the holes and then tied together in the middle so that the can may be suspended and hung. The container should be hung over a bowl and sand poured into it. Using a watch, children should keep track of when three minutes (or another time of their choosing) are up. Any remaining sand should be emptied; the sand collected in the bowl now becomes the timing sand. Children can use this timer to keep track of three-minute activities, including taking turns.



- **Experimenting with different types of sand.** Fine grain sand, coarse grain sand, and dirt all have different properties. Fine grain sand is best for molding. Dirt grains are small, but water does not go easily through them. However, the substances in dirt--such as twigs and stones--strengthen constructions. Have children experiment with each type of substance, first using a magnifying glass and then wetting the substances, molding them, and building with them. Encourage children to talk about their observations.

- **Using sand and water in dramatic play.** As children play with both materials, ideas for dramatic play naturally develop. For example, children like to wash dishes, bathe dolls, and do laundry in the water basin. Teachers can thus readily use the water area as an extension of activities conducted in the house corner. Similarly, sand play lends itself well to explorations of fantasy. The traditional sand castle, for example, can be used to spur children's storytelling or help them deal with fears. As they build their castles, children can tell stories of scary dragons and brave knights fighting against tremendous odds. Using sand and water for dramatic play is especially effective because these substances are soothing to children. Emotions and/or problems experienced and dealt with in the comfort of this area thus become less threatening to children.



The foregoing list of activities is just a sampling of the many experiments teachers can help children initiate. Depending on the developmental capabilities and interests of the children, teachers will want to supplement this list with ideas of their own. This section has shown how sand and water can provide teachers with countless possibilities for expanding children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth. The concluding section of this module offers some thoughts on tying in the information presented here to the child's home life.

V. Supporting Children's Sand and Water Play: The Parent's Role

A basic principle of the *Creative Curriculum* is that children learn best when what goes on in the classroom is supported by what goes on at home. When teachers enlist the aid of parents, both children and their parents benefit.

Helping Parents Appreciate the Value of Sand and Water Play

Most children have been exposed to sand and water play outside the school setting. Children may play in water as they take an evening bath or help with washing the dishes. They may play in sand during a trip to the beach or a visit to the neighborhood playground. These activities are opportunities for learning as well as enjoyment. But when parents watch their child empty a pail of sand in a playground sandbox, they are not always aware that the child is learning about science and math concepts, refining fine motor skills, and trying out social skills.

Teachers can provide a valuable service, therefore, by helping parents appreciate the opportunities for learning that sand and water play provide. By conveying to parents the information given in Sections I and II of this module, teachers can help parents value sand and water as learning media important to their children's growth.

There are several means--both formal and informal--that teachers can use to communicate this information to parents. Informally, teachers might share with parents a discovery their children made using sand and water when the parents pick up their children or during a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference. Formally, teachers might send information home in the form of a feature article in a newsletter. Alternatively, teachers may elect to hold a workshop on the subject of sand and water play.

In conducting a parent workshop on sand and water, many teachers find it helpful to let parents play directly with the sand and water tubs, using available props. As parents sift sand and measure quantities of water, they can generate a list of all the science and math concepts children might be learning from the materials. Teachers can then share with parents how they use these interest areas to stimulate children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical growth. By trying out selected planned learning activities, parents discover for themselves how tracking objects in sand develops fine motor skills or how pouring water into objects illustrates the beginning principles of science. Many teachers find that workshops are enhanced by a presentation by a noted expert on the subject who can validate the use of sand and water play as a tool for learning.

No matter what format is elected, though, the important point is that teachers share with parents the reasons for valuing sand and water play as a crucial part of the preschool curriculum.

Encouraging Sand and Water Play at Home

Teachers can help parents use sand and water as learning materials at home. To make sand and water play a regular, ongoing experience, parents might be given hints such as these:

- Water play can be set up at the bathroom or kitchen sinks. A large towel should be laid on the floor. If the sink is high for the child, a stool or stand can be provided. Outdoors, a small pool, tub, or old baby bath can be used.
- The miniature sandbox described in Section III would be ideal for the home setting.
- If a sandbox is not available outdoors, a dirt hole can be dug for sand play. Indoors, a plastic tub can be filled with rice or beans (if parents approve) or sawdust.
- Parents should assume that both sand and water play will create some amount of mess. However, if parents anticipate this ahead of time, they can prepare for this eventuality. Cleaning up can even be made part of the activity.

Teachers can also share with parents some of the activities outlined in Section IV for use at home. In particular, parents might enjoy doing projects with their children, such as constructing a sand timer or finding out that frozen water expands. Such projects not only teach children principles of science and math but also provide a forum in which parents and children can work together on a project.

By incorporating sand and water play into their home life, parents consciously support what children are learning at school. With this joint effort, children's natural curiosity about sand and water can be harnessed to extend learning and development.

VI. For Further Reading on Sand and Water

Beaty, Seddon, and Karen De Rusha. *Sand and Water*. Lexington, MA: Early Education Curriculum (5 Smith Avenue, Lexington, MA 02173), 1987.

Hill, D. M. *Mud, Sand and Water* (No. 308). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1977.

Rudolph, Marguerita. *From Hand to Hand: A Handbook for Teachers of Preschool Programs*. New York: Schocken Books, 1977.

Library

I. Introduction to the Library Corner: Philosophy and Theory 281

What Is the Library Corner and Why is it Important? 281
Developmental Stages in the Use of the Library Corner 282

II. Children at Play in the Library Corner: Goals and Objectives 287

Goals for Children in the Library Corner 287
Learning Objectives for Children in the Library Corner 288

III. Setting Up the Library Corner: The Physical Environment 291

Establishing the Library Corner 291
Selecting Materials for the Library Corner 294
Displaying Materials in the Library Corner 306
Caring for Library Materials 307

IV. Interacting with Children in the Library Corner: The Teacher's Role 308

Observing Children in the Library Corner 308
Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Use of the Library Corner 310
Extending and Enriching Children's Experiences in the Library Corner 315

V. Supporting Children's Experiences in the Library Corner: The Parent's Role 321

Encouraging Parental Support for Library Corner Activities 321
Setting Up a Home Library 322
Library Activities at Home 323

VI. For Further Reading on the Library Corner 324

I. Introduction to the Library Corner: Philosophy and Theory

What Is the Library Corner and Why Is It Important?

The library corner can be an oasis in a preschool classroom--a place to get away from active learning, relax in a soft environment, and lose oneself in the wonderful world of books. Exposure to stories and books, more than any other factor, encourages a desire to learn how to read. When children are read to regularly and encouraged to look through books on their own, to listen to story tapes, and to make up their own stories, they develop not only the motivation to want to read but also many of the reading readiness skills they will need to become successful readers.

Although books are the foundation of the library corner, they are not its sole component. As envisioned in the *Creative Curriculum*, the library corner also includes a writing center (complete with writing implements, a typewriter, and even a personal computer) and a listening center with tapes, flannel boards, and puppetry. All these media, along with storytelling by teachers and children, can be used by teachers to promote literacy skills (reading, writing, and communication). At the same time, the library corner can be used to facilitate children's progress in other areas of growth and development. Use of the library corner is an important source of learning for children for the reasons that follow.

- Children gain information and adjust to new experiences by reading stories on topics such as

    the birth of a sibling,
    moving,
    going to a new school,
    a trip, and
    going to the dentist or doctor.

- Children learn to deal with difficult events, such as

    separation,
    other people's prejudices,
    being hospitalized,
    the death of a family member,
    the death of a pet,
    separation from a loved one,
    divorce, and
    sibling rivalry.

- Children acquire specific knowledge about subjects such as

    science,
    math,
    history,
    health and safety, and
    famous people.

- Children become familiar with different genres of literature, including

  stories,
  poems,
  rhymes,
  folktales, and
  biographies.

- Children learn about social responsibilities, such as

  how to be a good friend,
  how to share and take turns, and
  how to behave in specific social situations.

- Children learn new ideas, such as

  what other people are like and
  what other places are like.

- Children expand their imaginations and creativity.
- Children's life experiences are reinforced.
- Children come to understand that their feelings, fears, and problems are not unique to them.
- Children feel good about themselves.

With so many possibilities for learning, the library corner is a vital interest area in the preschool classroom. The value that books and other communication materials have in the young child's life cannot be overstated. Children thrive from exposure to the library corner.

Developmental Stages in the Use of the Library Corner

In their use of the library corner, children go through developmental stages similar to those in other areas. Their first experience with library corner materials involves exploration. How are the pages of a book turned? How does a tape recorder get turned on? What happens when the keys of a typewriter are pressed? By examining and studying these materials, children become familiar with them.

Children's experiences with books prior to preschool will vary widely. Some have been read to daily since they were very young. These children have been exposed to a rich variety of books and encouraged to love and use books on their own. Others have had very little exposure to books. They may not have had books of their own or the means to get to a library to borrow books.

In learning to use the library corner, children have to become familiar with the materials before they can move to a more advanced stage of experimentation. They may need to find answers to these questions:

- What is the best way to use books without tearing or damaging them?
- What happens if I talk into a recorder but don't press the record button?
- Can I see my name if I don't put paper in the typewriter?

Some of the equipment in a library area is expensive. Teachers must feel comfortable with how children use this equipment, or they won't want to put it out for children to use independently. Taking the time to talk about how the equipment works and to discuss any rules regarding its use may prevent problems.

By manipulating materials repeatedly, children gain confidence in using them. They are encouraged to try new things and to seek out answers. They may solicit another child's participation in acting out a story or putting on a puppet show. They begin to memorize stories and apply their messages to real-life situations. In sum, over time, children's interactions with library materials become more sophisticated and more challenging as practice leads to increased levels of cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical skill.

Children go through several specific developmental steps in using books, the writing center, and the listening center. Each of these is described below.

Developmental Steps in Using Books

In learning to use books, young children go through certain predictable stages. In the first stage, children simply explore books. Copying their parents and older children, they like to "play" at reading. They also ask to have books read to them. As many a parent can testify, this frequently involves multiple readings of the same picture book at one sitting. Usually it is the parent who tires--long before the child does--of hearing the same story read over and over. Children enjoy hearing the same story repeatedly because they like to anticipate what happens next and they feel powerful knowing the answer.

In the second stage of development, children begin to understand the sequencing of a story. They start to realize that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. After a good many readings, children proudly retell the stories in their books. Adults are often amazed at a child's ability to recite a storybook nearly verbatim. Details are especially fascinating to children at this stage.

During the next stage, children learn to relate the stories contained in books to both the pictures and the words on the page. Children become aware that printed words have a different function from pictures. Gradually, children become aware that written words are symbols for ideas and thoughts.

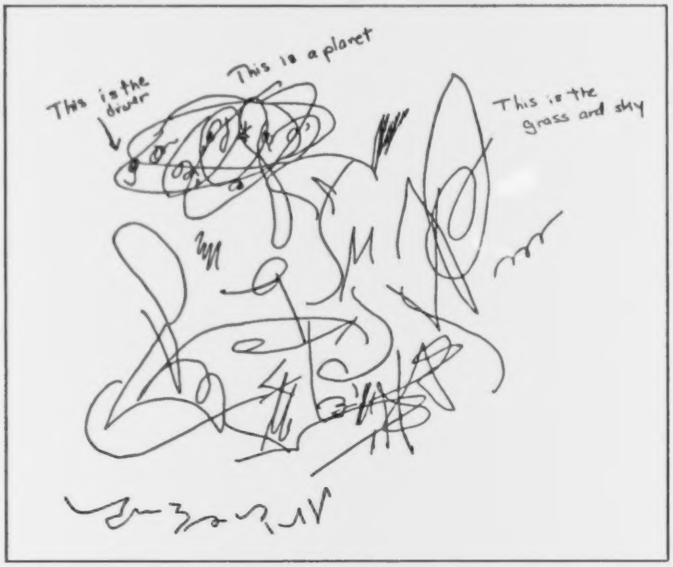
The fourth stage of development involves matching words with the printed text. At this stage, many preschoolers like to run their fingers along the text as a book is being read. They may also point to individual words as a story is being read to them. Even though their choice of a word is typically not the one being read, this behavior lets adults know that they are beginning to understand that printed letters represent specific words.

In the final stage of development, children focus more on the text. At this stage they become very curious about the meaning of words. They may ask questions such as "what does this say?" or "where does it say that?" During this stage, children start to develop what is known as sight vocabulary--the ability to recognize printed words. Children may start seeing words from their favorite books in real-life settings and excitedly point them out. Joyful recognition of the printed word STOP, for example, is a hallmark of this developmental stage.

Most important to a child's ability to learn to read and to love reading is the early enjoyment of books. Thus, regardless of the child's developmental stage, the teacher's primary responsibility is to help young children use and enjoy books.

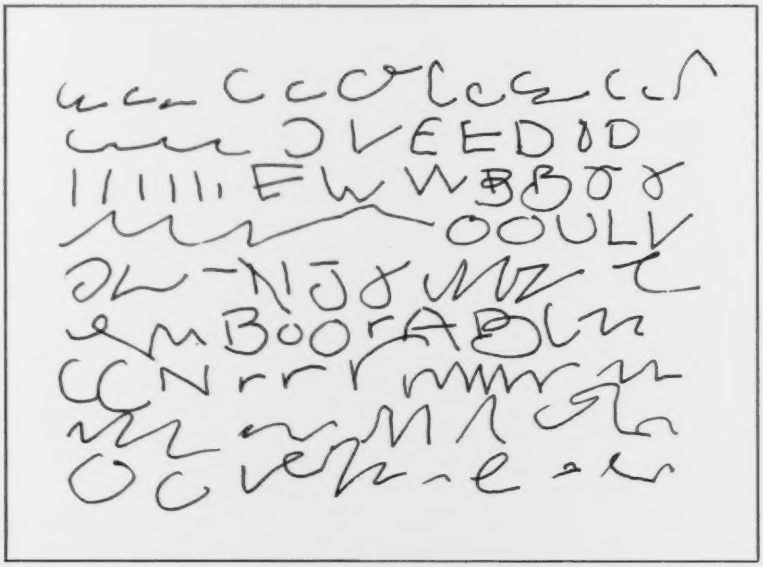
Developmental Steps in Writing

Just as they are drawn to books, so children are drawn to writing. They love to use pencils, pens, crayons, and other writing implements to imitate adults writing. These early attempts at writing are part of the first developmental stage through which children pass. Although their writing at this stage looks more like scribbling than anything else, it takes on definite form. In the child's mind, beginning attempts at writing are quite different from beginning attempts at drawing. The illustration below shows how a child distinguished between the picture she was drawing and what she wanted to write.



In the second stage of development, scribbles transform into recognizable letters. This transition is a gradual one. Many times, a recognizable letter will suddenly emerge from a row of unrecognizable marks. With practice, though, recognizable letters begin to outnumber unrecognizable marks.

By the end of the preschool years, children's writing generally shows increased organization. Children learn that letters can't just appear randomly on a page. To make sense, they have to be grouped into words that go from left to right across the page.



As with reading readiness, the most important factors in a child's developing ability to write are an interest in and understanding of the purpose of writing. When young children experience firsthand the value of writing--by making signs for their buildings, having their words captured on a picture, and experimenting with writing their own stories--they are motivated to learn to write.

Stages in Oral Communication

Language development begins during the first few months of life. Infants respond to language. They listen to the sounds they hear around them and notice differences in timing, rhythm, and pitch. Infants need to hear lots of speech before they develop their own. By three or four months, infants begin to produce their own sounds. They coo and babble. At around 9 to 12 months, babbling peaks. At 10 to 15 months, most infants can understand and respond to a number of words. They start using words to name objects and people in their world: "Dada," "car." They may say "doggy" for every animal with four legs. Children begin to make sentences by putting two words together to describe an action ("me go," "my ball"). They soon learn to add adjectives ("my big ball") and negatives ("no go outside"). By listening to how adults and older children use words, young children learn correct grammar.

During the preschool years, children's vocabularies increase at an amazing rate. Their sentences get longer, and they use language to relate to other children and adults. They are able to convey their feelings effectively in words rather than actions. By the end of the preschool years, children begin to take an interest in reading and writing. They understand that the written word represents the spoken word, and they try out writing.

This section has discussed the developmental nature of children's interactions with the materials in the library corner. The next section presents goals and objectives for children's learning in this interest area.

II. Children at Play in the Library Corner: Goals and Objectives

Teachers find that the library corner strengthens children's skills in all areas of development: cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical. By taking advantage of the many opportunities for development provided by books, tapes, and writing materials, teachers can use the library corner to promote children's overall growth. The choice of which skills to focus on should be a function of the children's actual developmental levels and expressed interests.

Goals for Children in the Library Corner

In deciding which goals to set for children's use of and learning in the library corner, teachers have tremendous flexibility. The following goals are offered as suggestions for children's development--cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical--through involvement in this interest area.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To develop a love for books.
- To foster creativity and imagination.
- To learn about cause and effect.
- To learn how to tell stories in correct sequence.
- To refine communication skills.
- To build vocabulary.
- To provide a foundation for reading.
- To provide a foundation for writing.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To learn to deal with fears and difficult as well as pleasurable life experiences.
- To master social skills.
- To develop empathy.

- To explore social roles and family relationships.
- To enhance self-esteem.

Goals for Physical Development

- To refine small motor skills.
- To improve visual tracking.
- To learn directionality.
- To improve powers of attention.
- To refine eye-hand coordination.
- To refine listening skills.

This listing covers only some of the goals that might guide teachers in their selections. Teachers should always consider the individual needs and interests of the children in their care as they decide which goals to focus on. New goals can be added if they seem appropriate and necessary.

Learning Objectives for Children in the Library Corner

Teachers have not only a wide variety of goals from which to choose but also a wide choice of ways to help children attain these goals. If a teacher wishes to focus on the cognitive goal of understanding cause and effect, this teacher will find that there are several learning objectives that can be targeted to help children accomplish this goal. For instance, the teacher may wish to teach cause and effect by having children experiment with equipment in the library corner and discover for themselves that pushing a typewriter key causes a letter to be printed on paper, or that a tape recorder will not work unless specific buttons are pushed. Or this teacher might wish to teach cause and effect through storytelling, by asking children "what would happen if...?" and encouraging children to complete stories in which certain "causes" are given. Alternatively, the teacher might introduce cause and effect by reading aloud stories that emphasize this relationship, such as books on science or tales with morals (such as *Finders Keepers*). The library corner lends itself to learning objectives that are as far-reaching as the imagination. The creative teacher can work toward nearly every goal for children's learning in an exciting and challenging manner.

To assist teachers, the *Creative Curriculum* offers teachers the following learning objectives as starting points.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To develop an appreciation for literature through exposure to its various forms in books and tapes.

- To develop language through storytelling, dramatic play, and puppetry.
- To acquire new concepts and understandings of the immediate world through continued exposure to books.
- To solve problems by operating equipment in the library corner.
- To tell stories in sequence by identifying the beginning, middle, and end.
- To expand communication skills by developing vocabularies, learning to listen, developing storytelling abilities, and practicing writing.
- To develop reading readiness through exposure to books and storytelling and refinement of related physical skills such as eye-hand coordination and directionality.
- To develop writing readiness through exposure to writing materials, familiarity with books, and development of physical abilities such as eye-hand coordination, visual acuity, directionality, and fine motor capabilities.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To listen to stories read or told in small and large groups.
- To deal with emotions and life experiences through storytelling and dramatic play based on books read aloud.
- To share and cooperatively play with other children in the library area.
- To demonstrate empathy when listening to stories read aloud by relating them to one's own feelings and desires.
- To identify social roles and relationships through exposure to oral and written stories.

Objectives for Physical Development

- To refine fine motor skills by manipulating writing materials, working a tape recorder, and turning the pages of a book.
- To follow the words and pictures on the page of a book as it is read.

- To demonstrate directionality by pointing to words across the page from left to right.
- To listen to books read aloud and stories on tapes.
- To use eye-hand coordination by manipulating materials in the listening and writing centers.

As this section indicates, teachers can use the library corner to accomplish a wide range of learning objectives. Not all the objectives outlined here would be appropriate for any one child, however. Teachers must individualize by selecting those objectives which best match the developmental level and individual abilities of each child. The next section offers suggestions for setting up the library corner to accomplish these goals and objectives.

III. Setting Up the Library Corner: The Physical Environment

The library corner in the *Creative Curriculum* includes three separate but related areas: the book area, the listening center, and the writing center. In some classrooms all these areas are located together; in others, the writing area may be incorporated into the art area and the listening corner may be part of a music area. Wherever these areas are located, how teachers choose to arrange the materials in them directly influences the effectiveness of the library corner. When materials are thoughtfully and attractively arranged, children are more likely to make use of the area. As in other areas, room arrangement plays a major role in facilitating children's learning.

Establishing the Library Corner

The key to establishing a library corner is to make it an inviting area where children will want to spend time. The library corner should be an enclave within the preschool classroom where children are free to relax and learn. Because this is an area where children can quietly explore the world of books, tapes, and writing, it should be as secluded as possible. Teachers generally find it successful to locate the library corner in an area that is not well-traveled and is near other quiet classroom activity areas, such as art and table toys. The library corner should convey the message that exciting things can happen within a quiet atmosphere.

The three types of interest areas within the library corner--the book area, listening center, and writing center-- are described next.

The Book Area

Children who grow up to enjoy reading are those who have learned early in life to enjoy books. By creating an atmosphere in which children learn to love books, preschool teachers can lay the foundation for lifelong reading pleasure.

How do teachers set up the book area so that children receive a positive message? Here are some ideas.

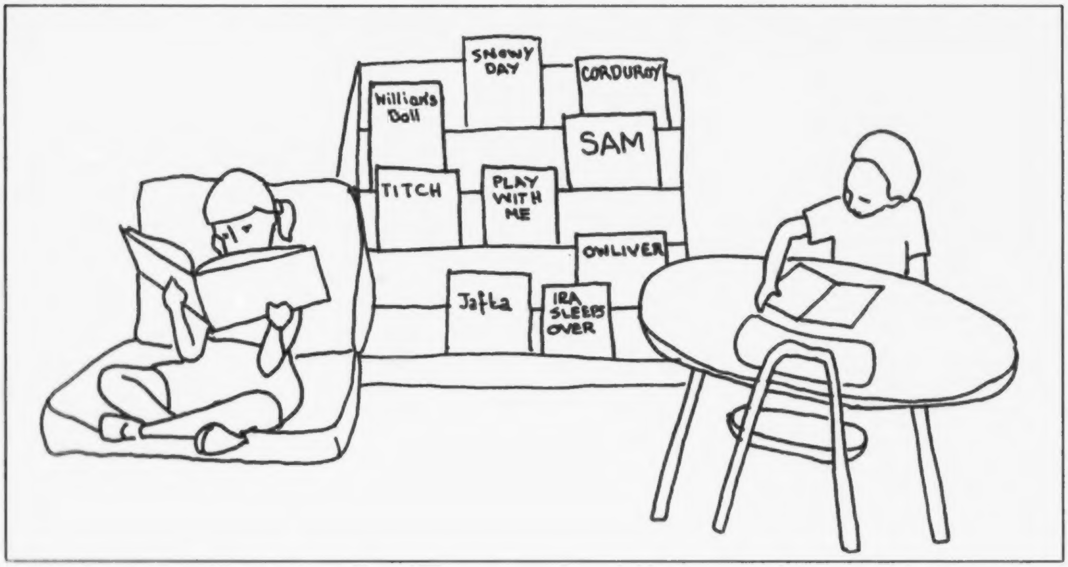
- **Furnish the area with soft chairs and pillows.** Relaxing furniture conveys the idea that this is a comfortable space. When they are offered overstuffed chairs or large pillows, children start to associate books and reading with comfort and pleasure. A rug on the floor, a beanbag chair, a rocking chair, or even a mattress covered with an attractive piece of fabric can help create a warm, cozy environment.

- **Include a table and chairs in the area.** Some children prefer to look at books while sitting at a table. A brightly colored tablecloth or a plant on the table can make this area even warmer.

- **Decorate the walls of the area with pictures.** Book jackets, photos of children and adults reading, and children's artwork can all make this area more inviting.

- **Light the area well**. Children shouldn't have to strain their eyes. Natural light, if possible, is always best. A standing lamp or an overhead fixture can provide additional lighting if needed.

- **Display books attractively**. Because children can't read the title on a book's spine, they need to see its front cover in order to recognize it. Books should therefore be free-standing on shelves at the children's eye level. They should be arranged in an attractive manner that invites children to the shelves to pick up a book to read.



The Listening Center

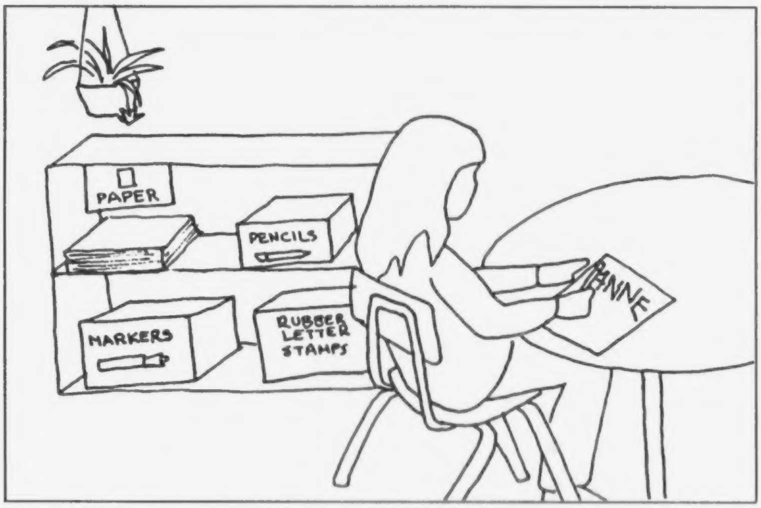
Like the book area, the listening center should be arranged to create an inviting atmosphere. Here, children need to be able to select a tape and know how to play it. They should be able to sit comfortably alone or in groups. They also need to have easy access to the materials located here and to feel free to pick them up and use them at their leisure. The same suggestions for using materials in the book area apply here, too. Specifically, there should be

- comfortable places for sitting (beanbag chairs, overstuffed sofas and chairs, a mattress, rugs, and so on),
- table space for children who prefer a "library" setting,
- decorated walls,
- plants, and
- shelf space to store tapes so children can use them independently.

The Writing Center

The writing center, unlike the other areas in the library corner, should suggest slightly more activity and less quiet than either the book area or the listening center. Children in this area are constantly engaged in doing something. The focal point of the writing area should be a "work table" on which children can use writing materials, a typewriter, or even a computer. (If a computer is used, teachers will have to be careful, in setting up this area, to locate the table near an outlet, making sure that the cord is not placed anywhere near lines of traffic. As always, safety plates should be over any exposed outlets.) Materials for use on the table, such as paper and writing materials, should be stored on nearby shelves for easy use. Lap pads can also be included for children who wish to work on the floor rather than at a table.

The arrangement of the materials in this area should be such that children know that when they enter the writing area, they will be able to find what they need and have a place to use the materials.



Selecting Materials for the Library Corner

The library corner can become one of the most stimulating areas of the classroom. However, this potential can be realized only if teachers pay attention to the materials at hand. If the books in the library corner are inappropriate or torn, or if the tapes available are of no interest to children, it makes little difference how ideally the library corner has been arranged. Room arrangement may facilitate learning, but the choice of materials determines what learning can take place. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that teachers select books, tapes, and writing materials that best support the goals established for children's learning.

Selecting Books for the Book Area

In equipping the book area, teachers have a wealth of titles from which to choose. There are many wonderful and appropriate books written especially for preschoolers. There are also many books on the market for preschoolers that are neither wonderful nor appropriate.

How do teachers go about choosing books from the many available titles? The first place to start is with the interests, life experiences, and skills of the children. Young preschoolers are centered on themselves, their families, their homes, and their friends. They like stories about characters they can identify with. Books that are appropriate for young preschoolers have the following characteristics:

- a simple plot about familiar experiences;
- colorful and bold illustrations that are clear, realistic, and filled with detail;
- illustrations drawn from the child's point of view;
- lots of repetition in the story; and
- engaging language and words (rhymes, nonsense words, and repetition).

Older preschoolers tend to enjoy books with more of a story. They can sit for a longer period of time and appreciate a story with humor or imagination. Books that are appropriate for older preschoolers have the following characteristics:

- a plot they can follow;
- a story with humor or perhaps a surprise ending;
- imaginative stories about things that preschoolers *know* couldn't happen;
- stories that extend their understanding of the world around them; and
- colorful illustrations with lots of details.

Older preschoolers also enjoy books about faraway places and other cultures if the content is not too far removed from their own experiences.

Books for preschoolers should also be nonsexist and nonracist. It is important for children to see the following:

- men and women in a variety of roles, displaying the ability to make decisions, solve problems, care for family members, and work outside the home;
- a variety of family configurations (e.g., a father and child, two children and a grandmother, etc);
- illustrations that portray people realistically-- for example, mothers who wear clothing other than aprons and people of various ethnic origins portrayed realistically, not stereotypically; and
- people of all ethnic backgrounds who can be assertive, solve problems, make decisions, take on a variety of family roles, and display a wide range of emotions.

In addition to these general guidelines, teachers should select books that reflect the life experiences and immediate concerns of the children. Books that describe typical situations, and characters who are struggling with issues that children relate to, are a source of comfort to young children. This is a major reason that care must be taken in selecting good books for the library corner.

The books listed below are organized according to topics of particular concern and interest to preschool children. They are offered as suggestions to teachers selecting titles for their library corner.

Books on Self-Concept

When Will I Read? (Miriam Cohen)

The Littlest Rabbit (Robert Kraus)

Black Is Beautiful (Ann McGovern)

Just Me (Marie Ets)

Tony's Hard Work Day (Alan Arkin)

Harry, the Dirty Dog (Gene Zion)

The Little Engine That Could (Watty Piper)

Umbrella and *Crow Boy* (Taro Yashima)

The Carrot Seed (Ruth Krauss)

Leo, the Late Bloomer and *Owliver* (Robert Kraus)

Fish Is Fish and *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse* (Leo Lionni)

Titch (Pat Hutchins)

Dandelion and *Corduroy* (Don Freeman)

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble (William Steig)

The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring (Lucille Clifton)

Books on First Experiences, Fears, and Adjusting to New Situations

The Runaway Bunny (Margaret W. Brown)

The Bundle Book (Ruth Krauss)

My Mother and I (Aileen Fisher)

The Night When Mother Was Away (Charlotte Zolotow)

Tough Jim, The New Teacher, Will I Have a Friend and *Lost in the Museum* (Miriam Cohen)

Bed Time for Frances (Russell Hoban)

Georgie and the Noisy Ghost (Robert Bright)

Ira Sleeps Over (Bernard Waber)

The First Day of School (Patricia Relf)

Jenny's in the Hospital (Seymour Reit)

The Emergency Room (Anne and Harlow Rockwell)

My Doctor, My Dentist and *My Nursery School* (Harlow Rockwell)

I'm Lost and *Mommy Don't Go* (Elizabeth Crary)

The Storm Book (Charlotte Zolotow)

There's a Nightmare in My Closet (Mercer Mayer)

Where the Wild Things Are (Maurice Sendak)

The Three Robbers (Tomi Ungerer)

Sabrina (Martha Alexander)

Shawn Goes to School (Petronella Breinburg)

The Two Friends (Grete Mannheim)

Betsey's First Day at Nursery School (Gunilla Wolde)

Moving Day (Tobi Tobias)

I'll Protect You from the Jungle Beasts (Martha Alexander)

Books About Cooperation/Love/Feelings

Play with Me (Marie Ets)

Best Friends and *Be My Valentine* (Miriam Cohen)

A Letter to Amy and *Peter's Chair* (Ezra J. Keats)

Always Room for One More (Sorche Nic Leodhas)

May I Bring a Friend? (Beatrice Schenk de Regniers)

Corduroy (Don Freeman)

The Giving Tree (Shel Silverstein)

Ask Mr. Bear (Marjorie Flack)

Do You Want to Be My Friend? (Eric Carle)

I Love My Mother (Paul Zindel)

The Runaway Bunny (Margaret Wise Brown)

On Mother's Lap (Ann Herbert Scott)

The Biggest Bear (Lynd Ward)

Abby (Jeannette Caines)

The Little Bear (Else Holmelund Minarik)

The Night When Mother Was Away, *Hold My Hand*, *Big Sister, Little Sister* and *My Friend John* (Charlotte Zolotow)

Best Friends for Frances (Russell Hoban)

Books on Anger, Jealousy, and Sibling Relationships

The Temper Tantrum Book (Edna Preston and Rainey Bennett)

I'll Fix Anthony and *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Judith Viorst)

Amanda, the Panda and *The Redhead* (Susan Terris)

Peter's Chair (Ezra Jack Keats)

No Fighting, No Biting (Else Holmelund Minarik)

Let's Be Enemies (Janice Udry)

The Hating Book, *The Unfriendly Book* and *The Quarreling Book* (Charlotte Zolotow)

Boy Was I Mad (Kathryn Hitte)

Nobody Asked Me If I Wanted a Baby Sister (Martha Alexander)

Noisy Nora (Rosemary Wells)

She Come Bringing Me that Little Baby Girl (Eloise Greenfield)

A Baby Sister for Frances and *Best Friends for Frances* (Russell Hoban)

I Was So Mad (Norma Simon)

Books That Convey a Positive, Nonsexist Image

I'll Protect You from the Jungle Beasts (Martha Alexander)

I Can Be Anything You Can Be (Joel Rothman)

One Morning in Maine and *Blueberries for Sal* (Robert McCloskey)

Tell Me a Mitzi (Lore Segal)

Katy and the Big Snow and *Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel*(Virginia Burton)

My Special Best Words (John Steptoe)

Will I Have a Friend? (Miriam Cohen)

My Doctor (Harlow Rockwell)

Can I Keep Him? (Steven Kellogg)

William's Doll (Charlotte Zolotow)

Go and Hush the Baby (Betsy Byers)

My Doctor (Harlow Rockwell)

My Nursery School (Harlow Rockwell)

All Kinds of Families (Norma Simon)

Mothers Can Do Anything (Joe Lasker)

Books About Divorce and Separation

Mushy Eggs (Florence Adams)

Everett Anderson's Year and *Some of the Days of Everett Anderson* (Lucille Clifton)

Where Is Daddy? The Story of a Divorce (Beth Goff)

Lucky Wilma (Wendy Kindred)

Emily and the Klunky Baby and *The Next Door Dog* (Joan Lexau)

I Love My Mother (Paul Zindel)

A Father Like That (Charlotte Zolotow)

Two Homes to Live In (Barbara Hazen)

Daddy (Jeannett Caines)

My Dad Lives in a Downtown Hotel (Peggy Mann)

My Special Best Words and *Stevie* (John Steptoe)

Benjie (Joan Lexau)

She's Not My Real Mother (Judith Vigna)

All Kinds of Families (Norma Simon)

Daddy Doesn't Live Here Anymore (Betty Boldgehald)

Do I Have a Daddy? (Jeanne Lindsay)

Two Places to Sleep (Joan Schuchman)

Mommy and Daddy Are Divorced (Patricia Perry and Marietta Lynch)

Books on Death

The Accident (Carol Carrick)

About Dying: An Open Family Book For Parents and Children Together (Sara Stein)

Go Tell Aunt Rhody (Aliki)

Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs (Tomie DePaola)

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney (Judith Viorst)

My Grandson Lew (Charlotte Zolotow)

The Dead Tree (Alvin Tresselt)

My Grandpa Died Today (Joan Fassler)

The Old Dog (Sara Abbott)

Everett Anderson's Goodbye (Lucille Clifton)

I'll Always Love You (Hans Wilhelm)

When Violet Died (Mildred Kantrowitz)

The Old Bullfrog (Bemice Freschet)

Books on Hospitalization

Madeline (Ludwig Bemmelmans)

Danny Goes to the Hospital (James Collier)

Curious George Goes to the Hospital (Hans Augusto Rey and Margaret Rey)

My Doctor and *My Dentist* (Harlow Rockwell)

Elizabeth Gets Well (Alfons Weber)

A Hospital Story (Sara Stein)

Just Awful (Alma Whitney)

Gregory's Stitches (Judith Vigna)

Tracy (Nancy Mack)

Eric Needs Stitches (Barbara Marino)

Jenny's in the Hospital (Seymour Reit)

The Emergency Room (Anne and Harlow Rockwell)

Books on Mainstreaming and Handicapping Conditions

See You Tomorrow, Charles (Miriam Cohen)

Janet at School (Paul White)

Anna's Silent World and *Don't Feel Sorry for Paul* (Bemard Wolf)

Lisa and Her Soundless World (Edna S. Levine)

I Have a Sister, My Sister Is Deaf (Jeanne Whitehouse Peterson)

One Little Girl, Howie Helps Himself, The Boy with a Problem and *Don't Worry Dear* (Joan Fassler)

Don't Forget Tom (Hanne Larsen)

About Handicaps (Sara Stein)

My Friend Janet (Lucille Clifton)

Apt. 3 (Ezra Jack Keats)

Our Brother Has Down's Syndrome (Jasmine Shelly and Tara Cairo)

My Friend Leslie: The Story of a Handicapped Child (Maxine Rosenberg)

He's My Brother (Joe Lasker)

Books on Old Age and Aging

Grandpa (Barbara Borack)

Kevin's Grandma (Barbara Williams)

I Love Gran (Ruth Sonneborn)

Annie and the Old One (Miska Miles)

Mandy's Grandmother (Liesel Moak Skorpen)

Grandfather and I and *Grandmother and I* (Helen Buckley)

Grandpa and Bo (Kevin Henkes)

Grandma Is Someone Special (Susan Goldman)

Granpa (John Burningham)

The Patchwork Quilt (Valerie Flourney)

Mary Jo's Grandmother (Janice Mary Udry)

Grandpa and Me (Patricia Gauch)

Multi-Ethnic Books

Oh Lord, I Wish I Was a Buzzard (Polly Greenberg)

Send Wendell (Genevieve Gray)

Corduroy (Don Freeman)

The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring (Lucille Clifton)

Goggles, Hi Cat, Whistle for Willie and *The Snowy Day* (Ezra J. Keats)

What Mary Jo Shared (Janice Udry)

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (Verna Aardema)

Anansi the Spider (Gerald McDermott)

Ashanti to Zulu (Margaret Musgrove)

Barto Takes the Subway (Barbara Brenner)

Nine Days to Christmas (Marie Ets)

My Dog Is Lost (Ezra J. Keats)

Friday Night Is Papa Night (Ruth Sonneborn)

The Rooster Who Understood Japanese (Yoshiko Uchida)

When Clay Sings, Hawk, I'm Your Brother and *They Put On Masks* (Byrd Baylor)

Angel Child and *Dragon Child* (Michele Surat)

Song of the Swallows and *Three Stalks of Corn* (Leo Politi)

The Five Chinese Brothers (Claire Bishop)

Jambo Means Hello and *Moja Means One* (Muriel Feelings)

Gilberto and the Wind (Marie Ets)

The Story About Ping (Marjorie Flack)

Doctor Shawn (Petronella Breinburg)

Sam (Ann Herbert Scott)

It Could Always Be Worse (Margot Zemach)

Arrow to the Sun (Gerald McDermott)

Black Is Beautiful (Ann McGovern)

This list is intended as a sampling of good children's books. There are many others that meet the selection criteria noted earlier. Teachers should select those titles which best reflect the interests and concerns of the children.

It isn't necessary to gather the entire inventory for this area at the start of the year. As new interests emerge, appropriate books can be added to the library corner. For example, if a child must go to the hospital for a tonsilectomy or is upset by the birth of a sibling, books on these topics can be added to the library corner.

The book area can also include materials that encourage children to tell stories and reenact stories they have heard. Props such as flannel boards and puppets often elicit storytelling.

Equipping the Listening Center

The same general guidelines noted for books also apply to selecting story tapes. Briefly, teachers should look for tapes that are

- short, since children's attention spans are limited;
- lively in their presentation, since nothing is more boring than listening to a dry, monotonous voice;
- technically well-produced, without static and hisses;
- nonsexist and nonracist in content; and
- narrated by both men and women.

In selecting story tapes, teachers should begin with those which are familiar to children or that accompany books found in the book area. Some story tapes are available commercially, but one of the best ways to provide tapes for this area is for teachers to make their own. Teachers should select books that the children particularly love and know well. The story should be read with expression and perhaps even sound effects. Teachers can put in cues to let children know what page to turn to and when to turn to the next page. This way, a child listening to the tape can follow the story in the book.

In addition to story tapes, the listening center might also be equipped with music tapes. Music tapes are important to include in the listening center for many reasons.

- Music is enjoyable and soothing to children.
- Children respond to rhythm and melodies.
- Many concepts can be introduced effectively through music.
- Music evokes feelings and provides an emotional outlet for children.
- Listening to different kinds of music builds appreciation.

The listening center should include a variety of musical selections. Although it is common for preschool classroooms to be equipped with records or tapes of children's songs, other musical selections should be included, as selections of different kinds of music will expand children's music appreciation. Short, lively pieces of music, such as marches, are appropriate for young children's short attention spans. Teachers might also look for musical selections that represent various cultures found in the classroom. Spirituals, folk, country, and classical music can all be included in the listening center.

Again, as with the book area, teachers should continually add to the materials in the listening center throughout the year. By so doing, the teacher ensures that this area has a dynamic character. This way, children know that when they come to the listening center, new and exciting experiences await them.

Equipping the Writing Center

Equipping the writing center is a process of gathering together relevant supplies and equipment and making sure they are accessible to the children. The following is a list of suggested materials.

- Writing tools:
  - thick pencils--black lead and colored,
  - magic markers--thick and thin, water-based,
  - chalk and chalkboards,
  - wooden "pencils" and magic slates, and
  - crayons.
- Printing tools:
  - letter and design stencils and
  - alphabet-letter stamps and ink pads.
- Paper:
  - computer printout paper,
  - magazines,
  - index cards,
  - envelopes and stationery,
  - unlined and lined paper,
  - construction paper, and
  - carbon paper.
- Other tools:
  - hole punch,
  - stapler,
  - scissors,
  - paper clips, and
  - pencil sharpener.

- Equipment:

  typewriter,

  easel with lined paper, and

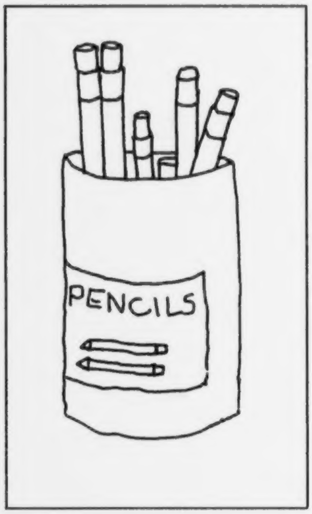
  personal computer with word-processing software (optional).

Displaying Materials in the Library Corner

How the materials in the library corner are displayed is directly linked to how much and how effectively they will be used. Books should be in good repair and attractively arranged on shelves in such a way that children will be drawn to them. They need to be free-standing, with the fronts of their covers in view so children can readily pick out titles by themselves.

With tapes and writing materials, artistic display is not as important as organization and accessibility. For these areas of the library corner, it is crucial that children be able to find what they want without having to search through boxes. In this regard, labeling is of great help. Items can be stored on shelves or grouped in storage containers such as bins, cans, folders, and boxes. By drawing pictures of objects that are inside a folder or box, teachers can alert children to exactly where particular items are stored. This method lets children know what they will not have to rummage through boxes in an order to find what they want.

Older preschoolers may like to see the written word as well as a picture of the object on a label. For instance, under a picture of pencils in a juice can, the word PENCILS could be written in large, bold letters. In this way teachers can help children increase their sight vocabularies at the same time that the children are effectly searching and cleaning up library materials.



Caring for Library Materials

Keeping the library corner in good condition sends children the message that its materials are valued. It also ensures that children will want to keep using the area. If books are marred by crayons or markers are dried up, children soon pick up the idea that this is not a very important place to be. By maintaining a neat, attractive interest area, teachers let children know that their work and participation in the library corner is genuinely desired.

As a first step, teachers should periodically check to see that all books, tapes, and equipment are in good repair. Torn materials, nonfunctioning equipment, and worn-out supplies should all be replaced as soon as possible.

Teachers can also solicit the children's help in maintaining the library corner. Books in particular can be periodically checked and mended. One effective method for involving children in this process is to enlist their aid in doing actual repairs. Older preschoolers can be especially helpful in assisting teachers in taping torn pages and erasing pencil marks in books. To facilitate this effort, a "book repair kit" could be kept in the book area of the library corner. A cigar box works well to house the repair items, which might include the following:

- transparent tape to repair torn pages,
- cloth tape to repair the spines of books,
- gum erasers to remove pencil marks,
- white-out to cover ink and crayon marks, and
- a pair of scissors.

As with other materials, the repair kit should be placed on a shelf at the children's eye level, with an identifying label behind it. The presence of the book repair kit and its use by teachers and children conveys the message that books are to be respected and cared for by everyone in the classrom.

This section has focused on setting up the library corner in such a way that children are drawn to the materials in this area. The next section describes how teachers can best use the materials in the library corner to promote children's learning.

IV. Interacting with Children in the Library Corner: The Teacher's Role

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the teacher's role is to set the stage and then facilitate learning. By observing what children do in each interest area, talking to them about what they are doing, reacting to their accomplishments and discoveries, and asking open-ended questions, teachers can reinforce and expand children's learning.

Observing Children in the Library Corner

It is not uncommon for teachers to spend little time in the library corner during free play. Children tend to use this area quietly, often preferring to be by themselves for a period of time. Busy teachers frequently find that their attention is more readily drawn to more active and noisy areas of the room where children demand their assistance.

The library corner is nonetheless a crucial part of the *Creative Curriculum*. Because it offers so many opportunities for learning, it's important that teachers not ignore children who are quietly at play here. Teachers can gain many insights into a child's language development, and his or her interest in and readiness for reading and writing, by observing that child's interactions in the library corner. Noting how children use the area provides helpful information on what teaching approaches ought to be used there.

Two approaches to conducting observations of children at play in this area are suggested:

1. following an individual child for a period of time in the library corner and recording what the child says and does, and

2. observing all children in the library corner for 10 to 15 minutes over a period of several days and recording what they do and say.

By recording observations on a notepad as children use the library corner or by using a checklist, teachers can ensure that their observations are not lost. These records should also prove useful at planning sessions and when sharing information with parents.

In observing a child's use of the book area, teachers might ask themselves such questions as the following:

- How often does the child choose the book area during free play?
- How does the child handle the books?
- Which books does the child select?
- Does the child talk about the story and pretend to read it?
- Does the child point out words in the text?

- Does the child use puppets or the flannel board to retell a story?

In observing a child's use of the writing area, teachers might consider these questions:

- How often does the child go to the area?
- For how long does the child demonstrate an interest in writing?
- At what stage of writing is the child?
- Does the child make letters or signs for a purpose?
- How does the child hold a writing tool?

And in observing a child's use of the listening area, teachers might consider these questions:

- How often does the child choose this area?
- For how long a period of time is the child able to listen to tapes?
- Is the child able to use the equipment independently?
- Is the child able to follow a story in a familiar book?

Teachers have many opportunities throughout the day to note children's oral communication skills. As they observe these skills, teachers should ask themselves the following questions:

- Does the child speak confidently and freely with others?
- Can the child's speech be understood?
- Does the child speak in complete sentences?
- Does the child understand what others are saying?
- Is the child able to communicate ideas and feelings in words?
- Does the child show an interest in word sounds and word games?
- Is the child able to tell a story with a beginning, a sequence of events, and an ending?

Taken together, these observations provide teachers with a picture of each child's interests and skills in activities that are related to the library corner. An informal assessment of each child can then be used to plan specific activities to promote the child's learning and growth in areas of strength as well as in skill areas that need attention.

Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Use of the Library Corner

The most effective way for teachers to reinforce children's interest in and use of the library corner is to visit the area at least once during every free play period. Although other activities may demand a teacher's attention--working out a problem in the block corner, preparing art materials, role-playing in the house corner--the library corner, as previously mentioned, should be given equal attention. If a teacher takes time to visit the library corner at least once every day, even for a few minutes, the teacher's presence validates the importance of the area and the children are more likely to spend time there.

One purpose of visiting the library corner is to reinforce what children are doing by taking an interest in and talking to them about their activities. This is important because

- it helps children become aware of what they are doing,
- it promotes language development, and
- it conveys the message that what they are doing is important and valued.

The Book Area

In visiting the book area, teachers can spend time with just one or a very few children. This is a good time to select a particular book to read to a child. Books can be chosen to teach something about a specific topic of interest or to address a concern the child has expressed. The personal time spent with the teacher as well as the message in the book are both invaluable to the child.

Another way to reinforce what children are doing in the book area is to simply comment on the child's actions or selections. A teacher might try the following approaches:

- Note that a child likes a particular book: "This must be your favorite book. I've noticed you looking at it several times. Tell me what you like best."
- Comment on a picture in the book: "Look how many insects are hiding in the grass in that picture."
- Reinforce how the child handles books: "I like the way you are turning the pages so carefully. You really know how to take care of our books."
- Ask questions that invite a child to talk about a selected book: "What do you think is going to happen next?"
- Ask questions that encourage a child to remember and retell a story: "Can you tell me all you remember about the story?"

- Ask questions that make a child think: "What would you do if you were Andrew?" or "Why do you think Peter's mother said No?"
- Ask questions that encourage a child to come up with new ideas and solutions. "That glue on her shoes really slowed her down, didn't it? What else could they have done to make her go slower?"
- Ask questions that encourage a child to explore his or her feeling: "Have you ever felt like Francis?" or "I bet you know just how Ira felt about sleeping at a friend's house. Can you tell me?"

Teachers can also demonstrate storytelling without the use of books. When told in an animated way, often with props, oral storytelling can fascinate children as much as their favorite picture books. Children can also be encouraged to retell stories they know or to make up stories. In this way, they gain a greater understanding of the relationship of the written and spoken word.

The Listening Center

To reinforce children's involvement in the listening center, teachers should take time to join one or two children in listening to a taped story. For some children, the teacher may need to turn the pages of the book to keep up with the recorded voice. Other children may be able to do this on their own and simply enjoy the teacher's participation. At other times the children may wish to simply listen to a story or music tape, perhaps with their eyes closed, and imagine their own pictures.

Some children may need help getting started in the listening center. They may not be able to select a story or music tape on their own, or they may be unsure as to how to operate the recorder. Sometimes the assistance of another child is all that is needed. Once children learn to operate the equipment, they can usually play in this center quite independently. When appropriate, teachers can reinforce children's play in the listening center by asking questions similar to those listed above for the book area.

The Writing Center

An attractive writing center filled with interesting materials will appeal to many children. Young children like to experiment with the rubber stamp letters, try out a typewriter, and use a variety of writing tools when these materials are readily available and located in an area set up for these activities. Teachers can reinforce children's play in the writing center by maintaining the environment and showing an interest in what children do. Teachers can accomplish this by taking the following approaches:

- Show a child how to use the equipment: "Let me help you get that paper into the typewriter so it's nice and straight."
- Comment on what a child has made: "You've made a whole row of A's and then a row of M's. I wonder what letter you are going to use next."

- Ask a child to describe something the child has finished: "You've been working on that picture a long time. Would you like to tell me about it?"

- Ask questions that help a child solve a problem: "That pencil isn't writing very well. What could you do to make it work better?" or "It looks like a bunch of keys on the typewriter got stuck. How did it happen? What could you do to keep them from sticking together?"

A teacher's genuine interest and support go a long way in reinforcing children's interest in the writing area.

Oral Communication

Teachers reinforce and encourage children's oral communication skills throughout the day. There's no one area in which language skills are promoted. However, providing an environment with defined interest areas filled with interesting objects and materials is one of the best ways to stimulate children's communication skills. Although promoting and reinforcing children's communication is not confined to the library corner, the topic is presented here because language use is so critical to the literacy skills that are developed through the child's interactions in the library corner.

Props such as puppets and flannel boards can be very effective in getting a child to talk, particularly a child who is reticent. Sometimes it's a lot easier for children to talk behind a puppet. Teachers can encourage oral communication by taking on a role with a puppet and giving a child another puppet to use. The two puppets can then hold a conversation together or even act out a story. Flannel boards can also be used to promote communication if the pieces represent a story the children know well. Traditional stories such as the *Three Bears*, *The Little Red Hen*, or *Caps for Sale* are all excellent possibilities for a flannel board.

Probably the most important way that teachers reinforce and encourage communication is by accepting a child's use of language and serving as a model. Preschool children often make mistakes in the use of language. They may say things like these:

- "I runned all the way."

- "I have two feets."

- "She's my goodest friend."

- "I hurted my knee."

- "I feeled happy."

Although it is tempting to do so, the *Creative Curriculum* urges teachers not to point out mistakes. To do so conveys the message that the child is wrong. Continually being told they are wrong only serves to inhibit children who desire to communicate further.

Rather, teachers can simply restate what a child has said incorrectly, thus serving as a model without judging the child's use of language. For example, if a child says "I runned all the way," the teacher might respond, "No wonder you got here so fast. You ran all the way here."

Accepting a child's communications means that teachers must do the following:

- encourage all attempts at communication, verbal and nonverbal;
- never degrade what a child says;
- not force a child to speak if the child is shy and not ready;
- get down to the child's eye level and listen carefully;
- be patient; and
- model appropriate language.

What can teachers do to ensure that they are serving as appropriate models? Here are some ideas.

- **Name things for children.** By describing objects a child is using, something a child is wearing, or what a child is doing, teachers are expanding children's vocabulary.

  "You have on your bumpy corduroy pants today."

  "I see you're using all the yellow pegs first."

  "What a long road you made with the blocks."

  "Sharie is stirring the soup--round and round and round it goes."

- **Use full and complete sentences that describe details.** If a child asks where something is, rather than saying "over there" and pointing it out, teachers should take time to say, "The magic markers are out on the art shelf next to the drawing paper."

- **Use a soft tone of voice.** A harsh voice makes children tense, and a loud voice makes them talk louder and creates unnecessary noise in the room.

- **Teach categories as part of ongoing communication.**

  "That *color* is blue."

  "We're having apples today for snack. An apple is a *fruit*."

"Here are some *farm animals* for the block area: a horse, a cow, and a pig."

- **Elaborate on directions.**

  "Roll the ball to me" rather than "roll it."

  "Put the paint brushes in the sink" rather than "put the brushes here."

  "Look at how fast Kirsten is riding the tricycle" rather than "look how fast she is."

Finally, teachers need to be sure that in serving as models, they do not monopolize classroom conversation. Encouraging and reinforcing children's communication means getting children to talk. Fortunately, because the preschool years are noted as a time when language development moves at a rapid pace, the teacher's job is made easier: most preschool children love to talk.

As nearly every teacher can verify, preschoolers tend to use language in creative and imaginative ways. A preschooler may say "it's leaking outside" to describe a slight drizzle or "she has old hair" to describe someone with white hair. Listening to preschool children's use of language can be great fun for the teacher as well as important to the child.

To encourage children to talk and to use language creatively, teachers might try the following approaches.

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

  "Tell me all you know about..."

  "What do you think will happen if...?"

  "How are these the same/different?"

  "What are some ways to...?"

  "What else can fly besides a bird?"

  "Can you think of any other animals who live on a farm?"

- **When discussing a concept, extend the conversation to encourage children to think of other ideas.**

  "What else moves slowly?

  Slow as a plant grows...

  Slow as a snail crawls."

  "Let's think of other things that are quiet.

Quiet as a baby sleeping.

Quiet as a..."

- Talk to preschoolers about how things look, feel, smell, taste, or sound. Because they use all their senses to learn, preschoolers are highly aware of the sensory characteristics of the things around them. Encourage them to describe in words what they experience.

  "Yes, this rock is smooth. How smooth is it?

  Smooth as finger paint?

  Smooth as...?"

- **Take time to talk about feelings**. Help a child who is upset to use words to explain the feeling.

  "I can see you're having a hard time waiting for your turn. It *is* hard to wait. How does it make you feel when you have to wait?"

- **Use a tape recorder to encourage talking.** Let children tape themselves telling a story and then play it back.
- **Allow time for sharing in small groups**. Children like to talk about things that are important to them or something they did during free play.
- **Plan topics to talk about during meal times**. These are great opportunities for one-on-one and small group conversations.
- **Collect pictures that will interest the children and provoke conversations.**
- **Act out stories familiar to the children.**

In reinforcing children's play in the library corner, as in all other interest areas, the teacher is building on what a child is doing to further promote learning.

Extending and Enriching Children's Experiences in the Library Corner

One of the easiest ways in which teachers extend and enrich children's experiences in the library corner is by regularly adding new books, new tapes, and new writing materials. An environment that changes ever so slightly, but often, motivates children to explore and try out something new. A changing and increasingly challenging environment maintains the children's interests and enables teachers to extend learning naturally.

The community library is a good source for new books. If it is conveniently located, teachers can take small groups of children to the library to exchange books on a regular basis. One simple way to make new story tapes is to enlist the help of parents who particularly like reading stories. A variety of tapes can be made of the children's favorites.

Teachers also extend and enrich learning by regularly reading to children, helping children make their own books, and incorporating writing activities into the daily life of the classroom.

Story Time

Learning to listen to a story in a group is an important goal for preschool children. Young preschoolers may be able to listen only for five minutes in a group. As children get older, a well-narrated story can hold their attention for 15 minutes or more.

There are several techniques that teachers can use in reading books to a group of children to make this an especially enjoyable and enriching experience. First, teachers should be familiar with a story before they share it with children. Reviewing the book ahead of time will provide answers to important questions such as the following:

- How long will it take to read the book, and can the children sit still for that length of time?
- Are there places where the children can join in (for example, repeated phrases, questions posed in the book)?
- Are any of the concepts or ideas in the book likely to be unfamiliar to the children?
- Is there anything special about the illustrations that the children might notice (for example, tiny details, hidden surprises)?
- Are sound effects part of the story, and how can they enhance the experience (for example, animal noises, sirens, etc.)?

Once a teacher is familiar with the story, he or she can design an approach to gaining the children's interest. Children will be more likely to listen to a story if they have a reason to be interested. Here are some suggestions.

- Tie the theme of the book to something the children have recently experienced.

> "Today it seemed like everyone was angry. Paula was angry at Gina on the playground because she wanted her swing. Mark was angry because he couldn't find his shoes. So I thought I'd read a book about being angry. It's called *Boy Was I Mad*."

> "We all had such a good time playing in the snow today. What would we have done if there was so much snow that no one could get out of the house? Here's a story about a little town that had a large snowfall. You'll find out who helped the people. It's called *Katy and the Big Snow*."

- Show the children the cover of the book or the first illustration and ask questions to gain their attention.

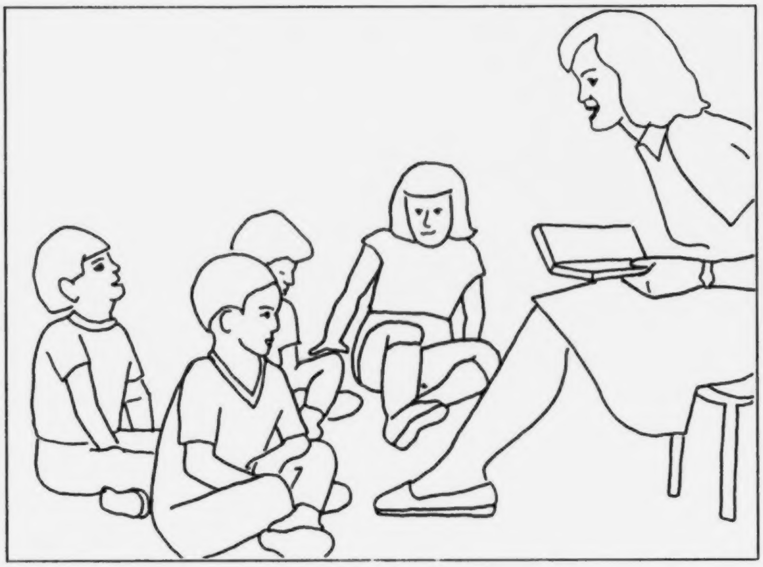
> "What do you see happening in this picture?"
>
> "Why do you think this boy looks so sad?"

- Bring in an object that is an important part of the story and talk about it.

> "Here's a nice round stone I found on the playground. Do you think we could make soup from this stone? Let's see what happens in this book called *Stone Soup*."

In reading the story, many teachers have found it helpful to sit on a low chair just slightly above the children, so everyone can see. Children can be seated in a semi-circle or in a group at the teacher's feet. In reading the story, the teacher might want use of following suggestions:

- Hold the book to one side so the children can see the pictures as the story is read.
- Speak clearly to suit the story, varying the tempo.
- Be dramatic--the voice should change for different characters.
- If some children are having difficulty listening, ask questions to get their attention ("What do you think will happen next?").
- Invite children to join in whenever possible with refrains and responses.



Story time doesn't have to end when the book has been read. Teachers can extend and enhance the experience of hearing a story in many ways. Here are some examples:

- Discuss something in the book and ask the children to share their own experiences.

  "Have you ever felt like Andrew did? Did people not listen to you when you had something to say to them?"

  "It was really hard for Frances when it was her sister's birthday. Did you ever feel like Frances?"

- Provide props so children can act out the story as a group.
- Make flannel board cut-outs of favorite stories so children can retell the story themselves.
- Always keep books that have been read at story time out on the shelves so the children can look through them again and again.

Reading books is probably one of the best ways to motivate a child to want to read. By carefully selecting books that reflect the children's life experiences, interests, and developmental capabilities, and by sharing them in a supportive and comfortable setting, teachers can help children learn to love books as they develop the skills they need to read.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an art form that is older than book writing. Some people have a gift for telling stories. Teachers who have this skill, or good storytellers that teachers know of, should be encouraged to come to the library corner and tell stories to the children. Storytelling experiences open up a new world for many children, especially those who need more eye-to-eye contact and a more animated style to keep their attention.

Encouraging children to tell stories themselves builds important skills for reading. Some teachers do this by showing children an interesting picture or a book without words and asking them to tell a story about the pictures. What generally happens in this approach is that the child talks about the pictures but does not really tell a story. This technique builds vocabulary but not necessarily the cognitive connections required to tell a story.

When children are encouraged to tell an original story or to retell one they know, their language tends to be animated and expressive. They use details to describe a long series of things that happen to a particular character in their story. They often begin with "once upon a time," specify a place and time where the action takes place, describe one or more characters, and include a sequence of events.

Some children love to tell stories; it's almost impossible to stop them once they get started. For those who are reluctant to tell stories, teachers can use props to encourage them to talk. Puppets are especially useful for shy children. Flannel board figures also can be used. Teachers can ask questions that elicit a child's ideas:

- "Who is in your story?"
- "Where is this person?"
- "What happened first?"
- "Then what happened?"
- "How did he react to that?"
- "What happened at the end?"

In other words, the teacher can lead the child through the sequence of a story, giving the child a framework on which to build. In this way even the reticent child may become a storyteller.

Writing Activities

A child's interest in learning to write and to understand written messages in the environment is not confined to the writing area. Children should be exposed to the written word in meaningful ways in all areas of the room. Children's experiences in the art area, for example, are directly related to developing their writing skills. By seeing the written word used in everyday experiences, children come to learn the value and importance of learning to write.

Here are some suggestions for making writing activities a meaningful part of a child's life.

- Include props in the house corner that expose children to writing, such as stationery, shopping lists and pencils, and magazines and newspapers.
- Help children write signs for the buildings they make in the block corner.
- When children have worked out a solution to a problem, suggest that it be written down.
- Develop a group story about a shared experience, such as a trip or a visitor to the classroom.
- Make signs and labels for the classroom that children can copy and/or illustrate.
- Write a group thank-you letter to a visitor.
- Put together a book of pictures that a child has made.
- Record a child's story about a drawing or painting.
- Prepare shopping lists with the children for a planned cooking activity.

Such activities demonstrate to children how writing is used to communicate ideas, messages, and feelings. They also expose children to the form of writing.

The suggestions offered in this section are just a sampling of ways in which the library corner can become a dynamic and interesting environment for learning. As in all areas described in the *Creative Curriculum*, the richer the environment, the more opportunities there are for children to learn and grow in all areas of development. The concluding section presents ideas for enlisting the support of parents in extending children's learning in the library corner.

V. Supporting Children's Experiences in the Library Corner: The Parent's Role

A basic principle of the *Creative Curriculum* is that parental participation enhances the learning process. When teachers actively seek the support of parents, it is the children who benefit most.

Encouraging Parental Support for Library Corner Activities

Most parents value books and the importance of developing a positive attitude toward reading. Whereas teachers may have a hard time convincing parents of the value of house corner or water play, they usually do not have to discuss with parents the idea that library activities are important. When it comes to the library corner, parents are already the teacher's ally.

Many parents value tangible evidence that their children are being prepared for reading and writing. They like to see worksheets and hope their children are learning the alphabet and numbers. Teachers have a responsibility to convey to parents that rather than worksheets, the most effective way to help children become readers is to cultivate a love for books and stories in the preschool years. Teachers can also help parents appreciate how the child's experiences in the library corner can enhance his or her overall development. For example, a teacher might explain to parents how children can refine their fine muscle skills, develop eye-hand coordination, and learn directionality through the use of library materials. They can show parents how library materials can be used to help children develop social skills and cope with fears, problems, and prejudices. The varied benefits of books and other library materials should be demonstrated for parents so that they realize that play in the library corner accomplishes much more than just preparing children to read and write.

How can teachers communicate this information to parents? Both informal and formal means are recommended. For example, when parents come to visit their children at school or during planned conferences, teachers can tell parents about their goals for learning in the library corner, as outlined in Sections I and II. At the same time, teachers can discuss any special concerns, such as learning or social problems that a child is having, which might effectively be addressed through library activities. For example, if a parent is going through a divorce, the teacher can suggest books that could be used both at home and in school to support the child through this difficult time.

Teachers can also bring their message to parents via a monthly newsletter. Here, they might give parents specific guidelines on how to select books, how to assemble a music library, or how to find books on specific topics. Teachers might include a sample list of books that parents can find at the local library and suggest that children be given a library card. Parents should also be informed about stories read at school.

Another means for communicating with parents--one that is highly endorsed by the *Creative Curriculum*--is to hold a parent workshop. Although there are any number of topics related to the library corner that would make successful workshop sessions, teachers might wish to consider the following, which seem to hold particular interest for parents:

- reading readiness (what is it and what can parents do?);
- writing readiness (what is it and what can parents do?);
- promoting children's language development;
- assembling a home library;
- using the local public library; and
- using books and tapes to support reading readiness.

On many of these topics, teachers will find that a guest presentation by a recognized specialist in the field enhances the workshop. Where specific skills are involved--such as reading or writing readiness--many parents like to have "expert" advice, which serves to reinforce and extend the teacher's advice.

Setting Up a Home Library

Because many parents are already predisposed to using library materials with their children at home, the teacher's task is not one of convincing parents but of helping them to do this most effectively. To start, teachers can assist parents in putting together a home library. Lists of appropriate books and tapes such as those in Section III can be distributed to parents. Lists of supplies for writing, such as marking pens, rubber stamps, paper, and pencils, can also be given to parents.

In addition, teachers can assist parents by giving them ideas on how to create a library area.

- Designate a place in the house where the child can independently read, write, look at magazines, and listen to tapes.
- Decorate the chosen area with pictures (made by the child) and plants.
- Add pillows and soft furniture to this area so the child feels relaxed and happy here.
- If bookshelves are not available, cover sturdy diaper boxes (large size) with contact paper and use as a bookcase, or use wooden crates or plastic crates as bookshelves.

Not all families have the resources to create a library at home. One option is for teachers to set up a lending library so children can borrow books from school. Taking a book home for the weekend can become a special experience for children. If parents cannot read English, teachers should select some books without words or books written in the parents' native language that can effectively be shared.

Library Activities at Home

Teachers can assist parents in making full use of the home library by sharing with them some of the ideas presented in Section IV. Reading books to a child and doing activities related to helping children deal with emotional problems can be undertaken very effectively at home--where children feel the safest of all.

Parents should also be encouraged to make full use of activities sponsored by local libraries. Very often libraries sponsor reading hours, film presentations, and special events that involve the entire family. Keeping parents informed of these events is an important service that teachers can provide.

Finally, teachers should encourage parents to use library materials informally, at the spur of the moment. Although planned activities play a vital role in children's development, often the unplanned moments provide the greatest rewards. If a child has been cranky, bored, scared, or overwrought, a book may be just the thing to lull him or her into relaxation or excitement. As they use library materials with children, adults must never lose sight of the need for spontaneity.

Experiencing an atmosphere in which they feel that both their teachers and their parents value books and other library materials, children learn that books, storytelling, and writing are indeed important parts of growing up.

VI. For Further Reading on the Library Corner

Adell, Judith, and Hilary Klein. *A Guide to Non-Sexist Children's Books*. Orlando, FL: Academy Press, 1986.

Arbuthnot, Mary Hill, and Zena Sutherland. *Children and Books*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1986.

Bernstein, JoAnne. *Books to Help Children Cope with Separation and Loss*. New York: R. R. Bowker Co. 1977.

Huck, Charlotte. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (4th ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987.

Larrick, Nancy. *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* (5th ed.). New York: Bantam Books, 1983.

Schickedanz, Judith A. *More Than ABC's: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1983.

Schickedanz, Judith A. *Helping Children Learn About Reading*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1983.

Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1982.

Williams, Denise, and Elene Cooper. *A Guide to Non-Sexist Children's Books*. Orlando, FL: Academy Press, 1987.

Wood, Dolores, Ruth A. Hough, and Joanne R. Nurss. "Tell Me A Story: Making Opportunities for Elaborated Language in Early Childhood Classrooms," in *Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987.

Outdoors

I. Introduction to the Outdoor Environment: Philosophy and Theory	327
What Is the Outdoor Environment and Why Is It Important?	327
Developmental Stages in Outdoor Play	327
II. Children's Play in the Outdoor Environment: Goals and Objectives	329
Goals for Outdoor Play	329
Learning Objectives for Outdoor Play	330
III. Setting the Stage for Outdoor Play: The Physical Environment	333
Setting Up an Outdoor Environment	333
Designing an Outdoor Environment	335
V. Interacting with Children Outdoors: The Teacher's Role	345
Observing Children's Play Outdoors	345
Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Outdoor Play	347
Extending and Enriching Children's Outdoor Play	349
Scheduling Outdoor Activities	357
Rules for Outdoor Play	357
Helping Children Enjoy the Outdoors	358
V. Supporting Children in Outdoor Play: The Parent's Role	359
Planning the Parent Workshop	359
Encouraging Outdoor Play at Home	361
Responding to Parent's Questions	362
VI. For Further Reading on the Outdoor Environment	363

I. Introduction to the Outdoor Environment: Philosophy and Theory

What Is the Outdoor Environment and Why Is It Important?

The outdoor environment can vary from a grassy space equipped with wooden climbing equipment and sand boxes to a hard asphalt playground designed for older children. A unique feature of the outdoor environment is that it is not defined by walls. It can be any outside area where children can grow, learn, and have fun. It need not be limited to just one play area but can include neighborhoods, parks, lakes, and farms. The outdoor environment is any outdoor area that teachers choose as a setting for learning.

The outdoors provides children with a healthy release from the quieter activities of the classroom. Being outside allows children to stretch their muscles, breathe in fresh air, and enjoy the freedom of space.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the outdoor environment is seen as an extension of the indoor classroom. The types of learning (cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical) that take place indoors also take place outdoors. The outdoors offers children learning experiences unique to that environment. Children can watch plants grow, follow the change of seasons, or see snow melt. Science becomes alive when nature can be observed firsthand. The outdoors is an environment in which children use all their senses to learn. They can see leaves change color, taste rainwater falling, touch the bark of a tree, hear crickets chirp, and smell the air after a shower.

Developmental Stages in Outdoor Play

The outdoor environment increases the learning opportunities offered by the classroom setting. A great many learning activities take place outdoors: climbing, sand and water play, riding, woodworking, gardening, dramatic play, and quiet activities such as art play and reading.

As we have seen, children approach each of these learning activities incrementally. Skills are mastered one step at a time. A child's developmental level depends on a number of factors, including the child's age, previous experiences, and the attitude of his or her parents toward outdoor play.

For each type of outdoor activity, children go through two basic stages, exploration and experimentation. During the first stage, children find out as much as possible about the environment. What is a sandbox for? How do swings work? Where do we ride? Children explore the properties of materials and the possibilities for using them. For example, a child who is new to a sandbox will sift the sand, experiencing what it feels like, how it separates, and how it falls. The child will sit in it, jump in it, and walk in it in order to get to know what it can and can't do.

The second stage of development is an outgrowth of the first. Once a child has acquired some experience with the materials, the child feels free to experiment and take risks. The child in the sandbox during the second stage of development will add a pail of water to the sand to see what happens or dump a pail of sand upside down to see if a tower forms. Excitement and imagination lead children to make endless new discoveries outdoors.

Because the outdoor area includes so many interest areas, individual children are quite likely to be at different developmental levels for different activities. To illustrate, four-year-old Doug, who has well-developed large muscle skills, is likely to be in the second stage of development in terms of his climbing activities. However, because his eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills are not as advanced, Doug may be only in the exploration stage in the woodworking area. This means that the same child who will leap across the bars of a jungle gym may have difficulty hammering nails during woodworking activities. Teachers thus need to design their programs to meet not only the needs of individual children but also the differing developmental needs of all children in their care.

This section has presented information on children's outdoor play and its developmental nature. The next section outlines suggested goals and objectives for outdoor play.

II. Children's Play in the Outdoor Environment: Goals and Objectives

Outdoor play usually brings to mind goals related to physical development. The large spaces typical of outdoor environments are perfect for children to develop large muscle skills such as running, climbing, and hopping. Playground equipment, too, promotes upper and lower body strength, balance, and coordination. Yet the outdoor environment is much more than an area in which children can improve their muscle development. The outdoors supports growth in cognitive, socio-emotional as well as physical areas.

Goals for Outdoor Play

The goals that a teacher selects for a child should be an outgrowth of two things: the child's developmental level and the child's interests. In setting goals for children's outdoor play, teachers need to take their cues from the children themselves. By observing them, teachers can see what skills children have and what activities they enjoy doing. Teachers can then use this information to plan a program that will incorporate both factors. For example, children who enjoy dramatic play in the house corner can use the outdoor environment to create a tent, playhouse, or puppet theatre.

Presented below is a master list of goals for children's outdoor play. Teachers are encouraged to select from this list those goals which best meet the needs of the children in their program.

Goals for Cognitive Development

- To make plans and carry them through.
- To enhance creativity.
- To understand cause and effect.
- To learn how to make objective observations.
- To learn how to solve problems.
- To learn beginning math concepts.
- To increase vocabulary.

Goals for Socio-Emotional Development

- To express feelings in constructive ways.
- To play cooperatively with others.
- To learn to share and take turns.

- To enhance self-image.
- To gain confidence.
- To learn to appreciate beauty.

Goals for Physical Development

- To develop large muscle skills.
- To develop small muscle skills.
- To refine eye-hand coordination.
- To increase balancing skills.
- To refine sensory abilities.

Learning Objectives for Outdoor Play

Although goals for children's learning are based solely on children's developmental and interest levels, learning objectives must also relate to program logistics. For instance, if a teacher wishes to target the goal of understanding cause and effect, the objectives for meeting this goal will have to relate to existing outdoor interest areas. If there is a sandbox in the outside area, for example, the teacher can select an objective using this area to illustrate cause and effect (e.g., an objective based on watching what happens when water is poured on sand). Alternatively, if the school has an outside growing area, the teacher could select an objective based on watching plants grow in order to help children learn about cause and effect. The choice of objectives is therefore limited only by the availability of outdoor interest areas.

Listed below are learning objectives for children at play outdoors. This list is in no way exhaustive; it is meant to be a tool for teachers to use in selecting appropriate objectives. Teachers are encouraged to choose those objectives which best address the needs of the children in their care.

Objectives for Cognitive Development

- To plan and carry through ideas by playing games, building sand creations, doing woodwork, growing plants, and creating artwork.
- To problem-solve by approaching developmentally difficult tasks such as climbing, woodworking, sand and water play, and tending plants.
- To reenact life experiences through dramatic play, sand and water play, and art activities.

- To identify cause and effect in sand and water play, in nature, and in woodworking.
- To note changes in the outdoor environment, taking nature walks, and so on.
- To develop an understanding of math concepts such as size, number, and shape through interaction with nature, experiments with woodworking, and work on art projects.
- To increase vocabulary by acquiring new names for plants, animals, and objects found in nature.

Objectives for Socio-Emotional Development

- To enhance feelings of self-esteem by learning to use the body in a competent way.
- To take turns and negotiate compromises by playing group games and using playground equipment.
- To demonstrate social skills by pushing and being pushed on swings, participating in dramatic play, and participating in group games.
- To express feelings through dramatic play and art.
- To demonstrate pride in accomplishments by performing physical feats, producing artwork, and growing plants from seeds.

Objectives for Physical Growth

- To use large muscle skills by climbing, jumping, skipping, and running.
- To use small muscle abilities by digging, picking up objects, pounding, playing with sand and water, drawing, painting, and playing games.
- To develop eye-hand coordination by catching, throwing, and pouring.
- To use a sense of balance by climbing, using the balance beam, hopping, swinging, walking on different surfaces, and using playground equipment.
- To demonstrate endurance through continued exercise and the use of playground equipment.

Taken together, these objectives form a basic framework that teachers can use to plan an effective program of outdoor play. The next section offers recommendations for arranging the outdoor environment to best help children achieve these goals and objectives.

III. Setting the Stage for Outdoor Play: The Physical Environment

While virtually every preschool has an area for outdoor play, variations among programs' outdoor areas are enormous. In fact, there is probably no other area of the preschool that varies as much in layout and physical appearance as does the outdoor area. Some programs have an outdoor area for young children with equipment specifically designed for the children's development. Other programs use public parks and playgrounds or outdoor areas originally designed for older children. It does not matter if the outdoor area is spacious or limited; every preschool program can structure the area to its advantage. By taking a thoughtful look at the outdoor environment, teachers can set the stage for learning. Even the sparsest of outdoor areas can be turned into an exciting place for children's development.

Setting Up an Outdoor Environment

Before beginning to set up an outdoor environment, teachers must first deal with certain legal considerations and safety concerns. These are discussed briefly below.

Legal Considerations

Many states have licensing laws and regulations that define the minimum requirements for an outdoor play space. These laws usually set requirements for the number of square feet of area needed, access to the play area, fencing requirements, and basic safety regulations. All teachers and administrators should know the laws in their state and be sure that their outdoor play areas meet these requirements. Often, counties have additional regulations. Preschools need to make sure that their design plans conform to both local and state rules.

Safety Concerns

Above and beyond legal concerns for safety, all teachers want to ensure that children are safe when they are outdoors. Because of the many different types of activities performed outdoors and the variety of play equipment in use, keeping children safe is no easy task. To help teachers assess the safety of their outdoor environment, the *Creative Curriculum* suggests that teachers look at these basic areas of concern:

- the physical layout of the outdoor area,
- the type and quality of equipment in use, and
- the type and quality of supervision offered.

In examining these areas, teachers should ask certain questions about the physical layout, the equipment, and supervision. These concerns are covered next.

Physical Layout

- Is the space large enough to accommodate all the children in the group? Most experts recommend 80 to 100 square feet per child.
- Is the space between pieces of equipment large enough so that children aren't running into each other?
- Is there both sun and shade in the area?
- Is there an area where children can be by themselves and engage in quiet activities?
- Is the ground cover soft under swings, climbing toys, and slides?
- Have drainage areas, electrical wires, and other hazardous equipment been covered?
- Are water fountains and bathrooms easily accessible?
- Is the area free of debris?

Equipment

- Is there enough equipment so children don't have to stand in line or fight for a place on the equipment?
- Is all equipment solid and in good repair? (There should be no rusted bolts, peeling paint, loose screws, or splintered wood).
- Does the equipment have appropriate material under it (i.e., sand or grass that is absorbent and able to cushion falls)?
- Does the slide curve at the bottom to become parallel to the ground?
- Are the slide handles in good repair and at the correct level for preschoolers?
- Are the slide platforms at least five feet high,and do they have protective railings around them?
- Is all equipment age-appropriate for preschoolers?
- Is all equipment free of sharp points, corners, and edges?

Supervision

- Do teachers have unobstructed views of the children at all times?
- Is an adult assigned to each active area of the play space (e.g., climbing equipment, riding area, woodworking area)?
- Do adults observe the children at all times? Supervising teachers should not be active participants in play or use the time outdoors as their break time.
- Are there established rules that children understand and follow (e.g., to not run in front of the swings)?

For further information on this important topic, teachers should consult the *Handbook for Public Playground Safety* from the Consumer Product Safety Commission's guidelines on playground safety.*

Designing an Outdoor Environment

Creating an appropriate outdoor environment is an exciting challenge for teachers. Although their efforts are, of course, limited by such practicalities as available space and funding, teachers have a unique opportunity to transform the outdoor environment into a creative learning area.

In planning for outdoor play, teachers might begin by considering the variety of experiences they want to offer the children. There should be active and quiet areas as well as places for children to play together and to be alone. The outdoor area should be inviting for all children, no matter what their interests, physical abilities, or learning styles.

In planning an effective outdoor environment, teachers might consider including the following activity areas:

- climbing,
- digging and pouring,
- riding,
- quiet play,
- pet play,
- gardening, and
- woodworking.

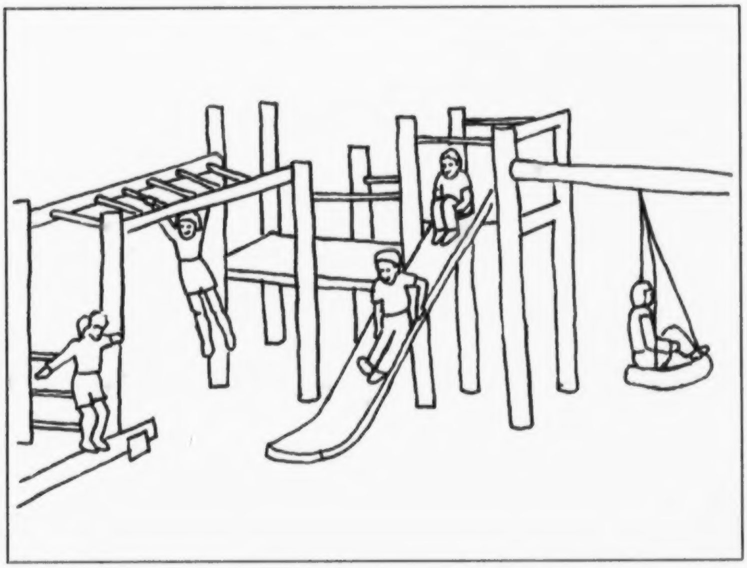
Each of these interest areas is described briefly below.

---

* Order from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207

Climbing Area

Children of all ages love this most familiar of playground areas. Young children like to perch themselves on the lower rungs of ladders and climbing gyms, while older children like to swing like monkeys from bar to bar.



The climbing area is enhanced by equipment that challenges children to use their large muscles to climb, chin, hang, and swing. Climbing equipment should be challenging enough to beckon children to use it, but not so challenging that it becomes dangerous. By knowing the children's skill levels, teachers can plan a climbing area that is exciting as well as safe. Some of the more popular equipment found in climbing areas includes the following:

- jungle gyms,
- wooden climbing apparatus,
- slides,
- hanging bars,
- tunnels,
- obstacle courses,
- ramps,
- over/under platforms and bridges,

- trees,
- logs,
- tire structures, and
- swings and tire swings.

Children at different ages and developmental stages will use the same equipment in different ways. Teachers should always allow children to move at their own pace when trying out equipment.

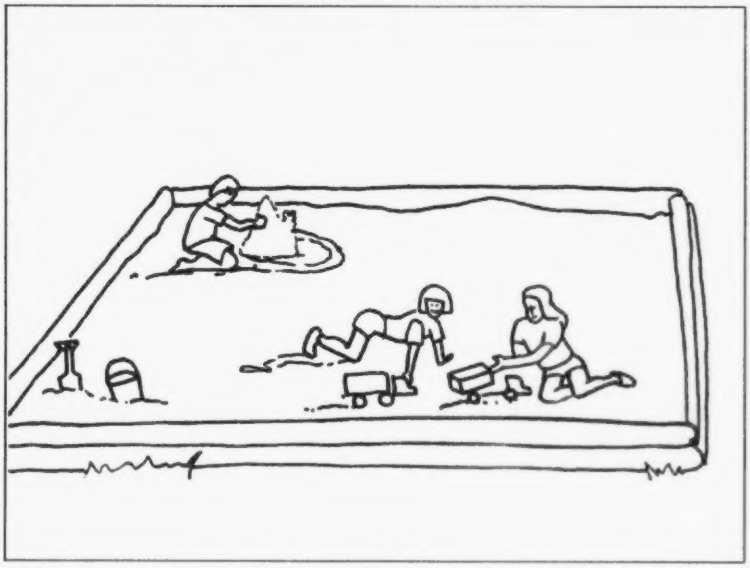
Digging and Pouring Area

The sandbox is a favorite area, particularly for younger preschoolers. The sand area needs to be large enough so several children can play either alone or together without feeling crowded. An ideal situation is to have an area large enough so there is space for riding diggers and tractors as well as for sitting and playing. It is also helpful to have this area close to a water supply such as outdoor faucets or water fountains, so that children can experiment with both wet and dry sand.

To enhance play in this area, teachers might provide the following materials:

- plastic and metal buckets, bowls, and pails with handles;
- shovels, spoons, and scoops of all sizes;
- old trucks, cars, fire engines, and trains;
- funnels and sifters;
- water pumps;
- pots, pans, and molds;
- wheelbarrows;
- small cardboard boxes and old or plastic blocks; and
- natural objects such as shells, sticks, stones, or leaves.

In addition to this basic list of materials, teachers may wish to add props that promote dramatic play. For example, many children like to use the sandbox as a setting for cooking. Poured sand readily becomes cake batter or a glass of milk. If children show interest in this activity, teachers can add spoons, mixing bowls, and muffin tins to the sandbox to stimulate the children's dramatic play. Prop boxes for other activities, such as a gas station or swimming pool prop box, can be brought to this area to suit children's creative play.



In setting up the sandbox area, teachers need to give some thought to sanitation concerns. Cats and other roaming animals are likely to regard the sandbox as a litter box if the area is unprotected. This problem can be solved by using a hinged top or plastic tarp to cover the sandbox when it is not in use.

Riding Area

Most children thoroughly enjoy using tricycles, big wheels, scooters, and wagons. These riding toys build large muscle motor strength and develop balance and coordination.

The only real requirement for setting up this area is that there be riding toys such as big wheels, tricycles, scooters, and wagons on hand, as well as a hard surface on which to use the toys. A hard surface can cause scrapes and cuts to falling children, but it is nonetheless recommended because it makes pulling and riding much easier. Riding skills such as peddling, negotiating turns, maintaining balance, starting, and stopping are all more easily mastered on a hard surface.

Teachers can enhance the uses of this area through careful planning. Dramatic play, for instance, can be encouraged with the use of signs, chalk road markers, and directional arrows to monitor traffic. Prop boxes, too, can extend play activities. A hospital prop box, for example, can turn bike riders into ambulance drivers.

Teachers can also use the riding area to conduct other activities, should space be at a premium. Because there is no stationary equipment here, riding toys can be stored inside and the hard top used to conduct art activities or to play jump rope, hula hoops, or ball games. Children who are especially coordinated might also enjoy trying out roller skates.

Quiet Play Area

As noted earlier, one important feature of the optimal outdoor area is a place specifically for children who want to be alone. Much of what takes place outdoors is lively and loud. Sometimes, though, children need to retreat from the bustle of climbing, riding, and shouting. They need to take a step back from high activity levels and relax with quiet, soothing activities.

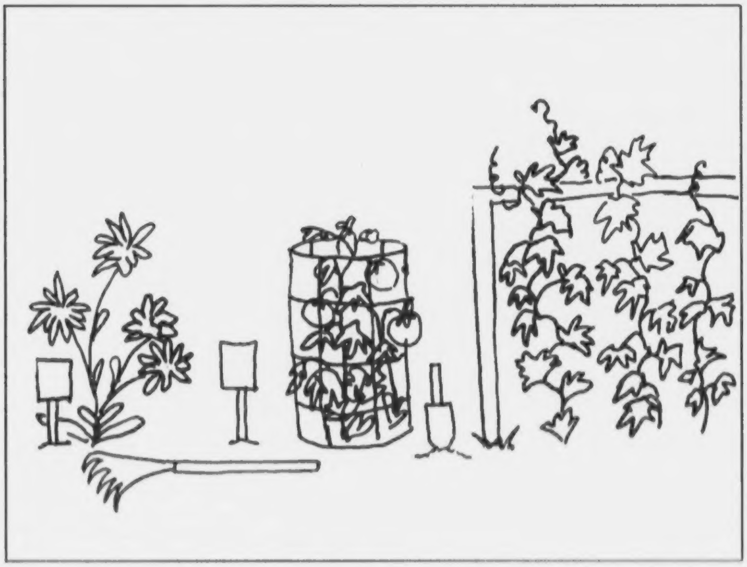
Ideally, quiet outdoor areas should be located in the shade, so that children can literally "cool off." There should likewise be places to sit--such as a blanket on a grass area or a picnic table near a tree--so that children can be comfortable as they relax. The quiet area should be more than a retreat, however. Teachers should equip this area with materials that offer the child something to do, not just something to get away from. The effective quiet area thus becomes a center for learning. The following types of materials are suggested:

- crayons, chalk, and paper;
- books;
- a tape recorder and tapes;
- paints and easels;
- quiet board games with large pieces;
- sawhorses and a blanket to make shade or a playhouse.

Garden Area

One of the unique features of the outdoor environment is that children can gather knowledge about nature. Learning how plants grow from books is one thing, but seeing it happen outdoors is quite another experience. When it comes to science, the outdoor environment is the perfect laboratory for learning.

A garden area is a choice opportunity for combining enjoyment and learning. Depending on the availability of land, teachers can set up garden areas to grow flowers or plant a vegetable garden large enough to produce food for snacks. No matter what the size of the garden, the opportunities for learning are there. Children love to watch the seeds they have planted blossom into flowers and vegetables. Nearly every child takes pride in a successful gardening effort.



For stocking the gardening area, these materials are suggested:

- several sets of garden tools,
- a wheelbarrow,
- seeds or plants,
- bags of dirt and fertilizer,
- access to water,
- watering cans and hoses, and
- string and wood to mark off the rows.

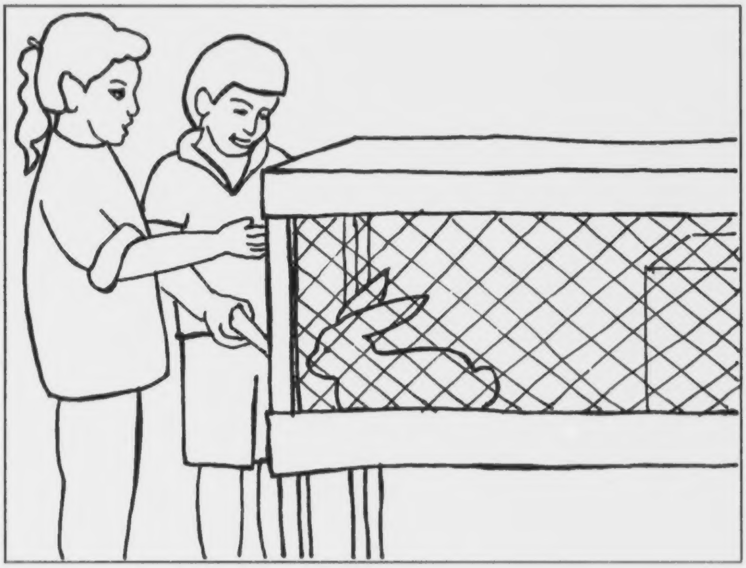
Pet Area

Having pets teaches children to care for animals and to be responsible for them. Rabbits and guinea pigs are common pets in preschool programs, although some programs have cats, dogs, fish, lizards, and snakes. Licensing requirements should be checked before bringing in pets. Administrators, boards, and leasing agents should also be consulted ahead of time to ensure that there are no objections. Here are some guidelines for having pets:

- Pets should have cages large enough for them to move around and not get hurt.
- Pet cages should be cleaned frequently.

- Pets should have correct diets; children should be taught not to give pets anything else to eat.
- If the pets are left outside during the night, the cages should be protected from the weather, other animals, and people. It is often a better idea to take pets in at night.
- Children should be taught how to handle, hold, and pet animals.
- Pets should not be handled all day, as they need some rest time.
- Arrangements need to be made to care for pets on weekends and holidays.
- Pets need to receive shots and checkups to remain healthy.

Including pets in the outdoor area is an added responsibility for teachers. However, the lessons children learn from having pets cannot be taught in better ways. Having pets gives children a chance to learn responsibility, empathy, and caring. Children have an opportunity to observe growth, change, and the habits of a live animal. They learn about birth, life styles, and sometimes death.



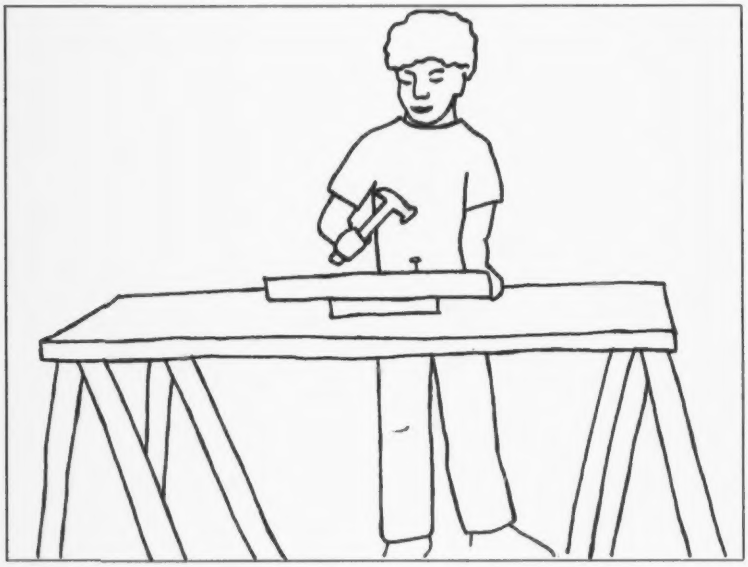
Woodworking Area

The outdoor area is an excellent location for woodworking. Activities with tools and wood can be as simple as banging nails into a large tree stump or as sophisticated as working with tools, lumber, a workbench, and assorted objects for decorating constructions.

Because children in this area are usually intensely involved in what they are doing, many teachers find it a good idea to locate the woodworking area in a place where children will not be disturbed.

Use of all woodworking tools requires careful supervision by teachers. Therefore, the design of this area should be such that teachers have an unobstructed view at all times. Moreover, work areas should be arranged so that a teacher can intervene at any moment, should an unsafe activity occur.

In a woodworking area, a sturdy workbench is essential. It should be at an appropriate height for children--approximately at waist level. If children will be sawing, the workbench should be equipped with C-clamps or vises to hold the wood securely.



Tools should be kept in a sturdy box or hung on a pegboard with outlines to show where each tool belongs. Tools should never be allowed to get wet, as most will rust. A basic set of tools includes the following:

- claw hammers (11-13 oz.),
- cross-cut saws (12-16 oz.),

- assorted nails with large heads,
- hand drills,
- rulers,
- metal files and sand paper, and
- scraps of soft wood (pine) in assorted sizes.

At first, children will enjoy experimenting with real tools and wood. Learning to use a saw, to drill holes in wood, and to hammer a nail into wood will be satisfying enough to maintain interest in the area. As children gain skills, they will respond positively to the addition of new materials. Here are some suggestions:

- dowels,
- popsicle sticks,
- corks,
- wire,
- wooden spools,
- Elmer's glue,
- yarn and string,
- styrofoam,
- feathers, and
- bottle caps.

Sometimes children like to paint the things they make at the workbench. Tempera paint from the art area can be brought outdoors, or the construction can be brought inside for painting.

Storage

Because most of the materials and equipment used outdoors cannot be left unattended, many teachers wonder if there is not a solution easier than carrying materials from inside the classroom to the outdoors on a daily basis. One solution offered by the *Creative Curriculum* is to build a storage shed. Parents, senior citizen groups, or local industrial art classes frequently can be counted on to volunteer their services for a special building project. Alternatively, a shed can be purchased from a lumber yard and assembled as part of a class project. If the shed is made of wood, its outer walls make a wonderful mural area on which children can paint.

The areas just discussed constitute a blueprint for various outdoor interest areas. Teachers will, of course, have to adapt this design plan to fit the constraints of the outdoor area available to their programs. If space is limited, teachers may have to cut back or double up on interest areas. For example, as already noted, the riding area can be used for woodworking and the quiet area for art or group games. The key to successful use of the outdoor area is that traffic patterns must be safe and easy to follow. Children should have a clear idea of what activities are done where. Signs illustrating activities can be posted, and ropes can be used to fence in areas, if needed. With clearly designated areas, it is possible to avoid accidents, confusion, and hurt feelings, and both learning and fun can be promoted.

This section has presented recommendations for expanding the use of the outdoor environment by creating a variety of interest areas. The success of the outdoor environment depends very much on how teachers facilitate and support children's play in these activity areas. This is the subject of the next section.

IV. Interacting with Children Outdoors: The Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in the outdoor environment is the same as that played in the indoor environment: to facilitate children's learning. Although the setting is different and the opportunities for learning are more varied, the teacher's task is still one of observing, reinforcing, extending, and enriching the children's activities.

Observing Children's Play Outdoors

In the *Creative Curriculum*, the teacher's primary role is to become familiar with what children are doing in the environment so that an appropriate program can be designed to meet the children's needs. The best tool teachers can use to learn about children's behavior in the outdoor environment is direct observations. By following a child for 10 to 15 minutes periodically, teachers can collect data on what that child is doing, the materials the child uses, the people the child likes to play with, and the developmental capabilities of that child in each of the outdoor interest areas.

Observing children outdoors demands concentration. Because so many activities are going on at once, it is easy for teachers to watch children without really seeing what is going on. Teachers need to train themselves to watch children's actions without attempting to analyze them on the spot. Observations can later be shared with colleagues and parents to gain insight into behavior. As they are being made, though, observations need to be objective. Many teachers find it helpful to keep notecards to jot down observations as they are made.

What should teachers look for when observing children outdoors? The following are some suggestions for observing individual children and for noting what is happening in specific outdoor interest areas.

Observing Children Outdoors

- What play areas does the child use?
- What specific equipment does the child use?
- Are there play areas the child avoids?
- Is there specific equipment the child avoids?
- Does the child interact with others? Who initiates play?
- How are conflicts resolved?
- How long does the child play in each area?
- Does the child use the equipment/area in creative ways?

- Does the child ask for help? Who does the child ask (adults or children)?
- Does the child act differently (e.g., in terms of language, social skills, physical skills) outdoors than indoors?
- What is the child specifically interested in (e.g., trees, sand, seasons, wind)?
- Does the child seem to be involved?

Observing Children in the Large Motor Areas

- Does the child use the equipment? Which pieces? How well?
- Does the child try new things with the equipment or continually practice old skills?
- Does the child engage in dramatic play on the equipment? What roles does he or she play?
- Does the child ask for help?

Observing Children in the Digging and Pouring Area

- What props (pails, bowls, cars) does the child use?
- How long does the child stay in the sand area? Does the child need to be encouraged to try something new?
- Does the child explore different possibilities for solving problems?

Observing Children in the Riding Area

- Can the child use the riding toys? Which ones?
- How well does the child use the riding toys (i.e., how capable is the child of controlling speed, turning corners, or riding through obstacle courses)?
- Can the child take turns with the equipment?

Observing Children in the Quiet Area

- What activities in the quiet area does the child enjoy the most--games, art, imagery, books, songs?
- Does the child rest and "cool off" if needed?
- Does the child seem to need to be in an area where there is quiet?

Observing Children in the Gardening and Pets Areas

- Is the child careful and loving with animals?
- Does the child tend the garden?

Observing Children in the Woodworking Area

- What tools is the child able to use? How well?
- Does the child share and work with others?
- What does the child create?

Closely observing children outdoors gives teachers the opportunity to see how children use their skills in this unique environment. And by observing children both outdoors and indoors, teachers get a full picture of each child's strengths, needs, and preferences. They often see skills displayed outdoors that they never knew about, discover parts of the child's personality they've never seen before, and become aware of unexpected courage or fears.

Reacting to and Reinforcing Children's Outdoor Play

By observing children's outdoor play, teachers gain valuable information on children's developmental levels. Armed with this insight, teachers can reinforce what children are learning. One of the teacher's chief means of reinforcement is the use of praise and encouragement. By observing children's accomplishments and praising them, teachers encourage children to keep trying new things. When a teacher notices a child accomplishing something, the child receives this message: "I'm OK and I can do something well enough for the teacher to notice me."

When praising children for an accomplishment, teachers should be specific about what it is they are praising. If a child rides a trike by herself for the first time, the teacher can offer this encouragement: "Susie, I saw you ride the trike all by yourself! You rode a long way." If a child finally pets the bunny after being afraid to get too close, the teacher can reinforce this accomplishment by saying "Jose, it was a little scary to pet the bunny, but you did it. Was the bunny soft?" A comment like this tells the child it is all right to be scared and offers him a chance to talk about it if he wants to.

For offering encouragement to children, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Use the child's name. This makes the child feel important and unique and also assures the child that he or she is being addressed.
- Be specific about what the child has accomplished. If the child's climbing skills are noteworthy, mention this.
- Be careful not to use value-laden words such as good and great. Say, instead, "You jumped high on the pogo stick."
- Find something worthy of praise about each child.

Children often seek reinforcement from their teachers. "Look at me!" or "Watch what I can do!" are often heard on the playground. Some children ask for acknowledgment many times during an outdoor session. As much as possible, teachers should return these requests with encouraging statements. Children who seek praise in this way do so because they need it. Teachers should try to praise each child they are watching--even those who don't seek it. Climbing up one rung of the jungle gym may be as big an accomplishment for one child as climbing to the top is for another.

Encouraging children to challenge themselves and learn new skills is another important role for the teacher outdoors. When encouraging children to try the slide again or to pound with a hammer after a thumb has been banged, teachers should praise their efforts in a way that challenges children individually and does not put them in a competitive situation. Instead of saying to Shawn, "Watch how Alison holds the hammer," say "Shawn, I'll show you how to hold the hammer, and we can pound the nail together." This does not compare the children's abilities and tells Shawn that it's OK to make a mistake and try again--and that the teacher is there to help.

For some children, the physical challenges of the outdoors are scary. It is important, therefore, to offer help as well as encouragement. Teachers can offer to hold children as they climb to the top of the slide or to catch them at the bottom. When teachers are unclear if children want help, they should ask how they can be of help. "Do you want me to...?" will usually get an honest answer.

Sometimes a situation becomes too challenging for children. They will start to cry or ask to be helped down or off a piece of equipment. In these instances, teachers should acknowledge that the situation is scary. Teachers should willingly help children remove themselves from a frightening situation, talk about it if they want to, and go on with their next activity. Children need to hear the message that it is all right to be scared and ask for help. The teacher should reinforce what a child has accomplished and tell the child that he or she may want to try again on another day.

Extending and Enriching Children's Outdoor Play

As noted, the teacher's role in the outdoor environment is to observe, encourage, and support children in their chosen activities. Sometimes, though, it is necessary for teachers to take a more active stance and actually intervene in the children's play. There are two instances in which intervention is not only appropriate but necessary:

1. to ensure children's safety and

2. to enhance the learning process.

In matters of safety, teachers must intervene. If a child is standing dangerously close to a swing, or if a building being constructed in the woodworking area is about to topple, teachers need to step in immediately. Intervention of this sort is never interference; it is a question of safety.

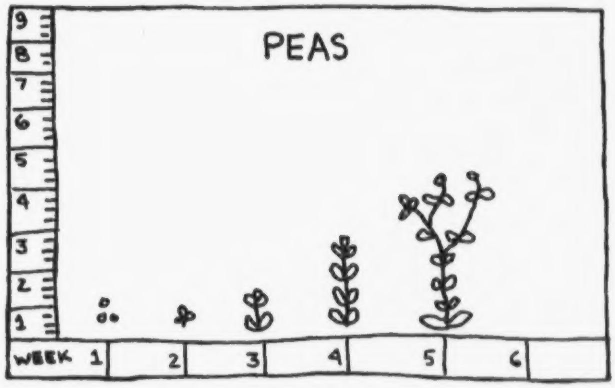
When intervening for a reason of safety, teachers should be sure to give clear, specific directions. Yelling "Stanley, be careful with the hammer!" does not tell Stanley what he is doing incorrectly; it only interrupts his concentration. Stanley needs to be told specifically what do to correct the problem. For example, if he's pounding with the wrong end, his teacher should say, "Stanley, turn the hammer over and pound with the flat side." If this receives no response, the teacher should show Stanley how to do it. If Sally is standing in front of the slide and another child is about to slide down and hit her, it does not help for the teacher to yell her name. She is likely to stand there and look at the teacher, but she may not move. She will, however, move out of the way if her teacher says, "Sally, move out of the way--Jahmal is coming down the slide." This tells her what to do and why. After the incident is over, Sally can then be reminded of the rules and what could have happened.

Intervention to enhance the learning process is not as clear-cut. Rather, it is a judgment that teachers have to make. Does the child play with the same equipment day after day? Does the child seem reluctant to try certain activities? Does the child become bored frequently? Does the child seem unsure about how to proceed? If the answers to these questions are positive, teacher intervention is probably in order.

Teacher intervention is used to expand the learning process beyond what the child is already comfortable doing. The following examples illustrate the process of intervention.

- **Example 1.** It starts to sprinkle when the children are outside. The teacher sees birds flying and asks the children, "Where do you think the birds are going?" A child may answer "home." The teacher can expand on this answer: "They might be going home. Where else could they be going?" or "Does anyone know what we call a bird's home?" This could lead to the beginning of a science-related experience about birds and their homes.

- **Example 2.** In planting a garden the children become interested in the different sizes of seeds and what they will grow into. Their questions offer the teacher the chance to introduce a range of activities--from learning the names of flowers and vegetables to measuring the seeds and developing a chart so the children can measure the plants' growth and compare their present size to the original size of the seeds.



In addition to initiating conversations, teachers can intervene by offering planned learning experiences to further children's learning. Because the outdoor area includes a range of interest areas, possible planned learning activities are obviously numerous. Teachers are free to plan and implement whatever activities they feel will enhance children's learning. These activities offer children opportunities to:

- recall experiences ("What did you see happening?");
- predict cause and effect ("What do you think will happen if...?");
- compare and classify ("Which one is heavier?"); and
- look for solutions to problems ("What are some ways to move the snow from here to the sandbox?").

In deciding which activities to implement, teachers may wish to consider the following suggestions involving dramatic, mud, snow, and art play.

Dramatic Play

In the climbing area, children's imaginations often come alive. There are places to climb, places to sit and watch others, and new things to explore. Equipment can be transformed into a boat, plane, a castle, a mountain, or a fort. Teachers need relatively few props to encourage dramatic play. A blanket can be spread over part of the structure to change its form. Crepe paper, scarves, or other objects can be given to children to add new dimensions to the structures. Children can then be encouraged to act as mountaineers, skippers of boats, or pilots of planes.

Mud Play

Mud play typically occurs in a dirt hole. Mud is very different from sand in its texture and feel and thus offers new sensory experiences for children. Mud is often naturally available in the spring after a warm rain. If there is a garden space that hasn't been planted yet, teachers can let children walk in it. They love to feel and watch the mud squish up between their toes and cover their feet. Mud pies and cakes are fun, too. Making them is of course messy, and teachers may want to set up this activity for a summer day when the children are wearing their bathing suits and can be hosed off.

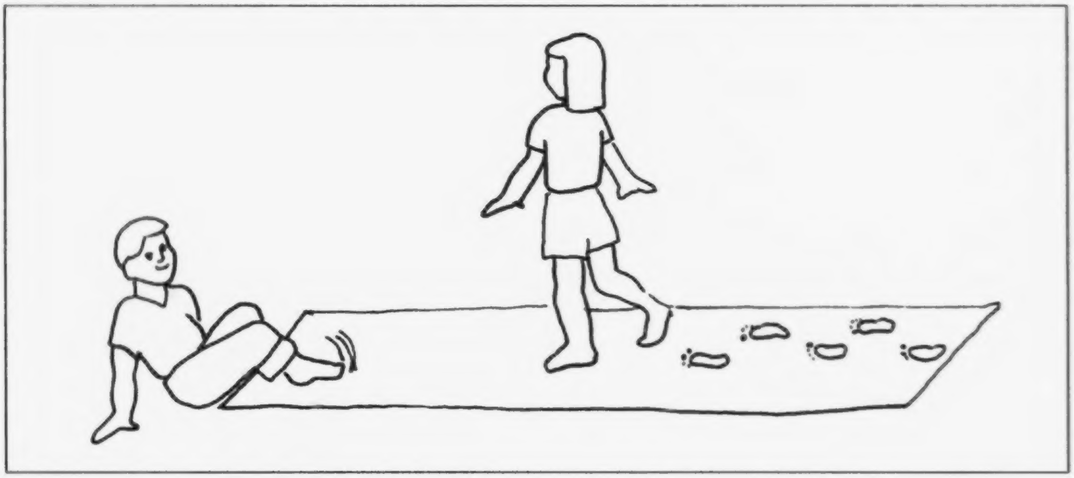
Snow Play

Snow intrigues children. They love to watch it fall and cover the ground in white. Few children can resist tasting a snowflake or making figures on a clean patch of snow. In the winter, digging in the snow and sand adds to the fun and challenge of builders. Tunnels, bridges, big buildings, and giant pizzas can be made with snow and sand. Bowls of water left in the sandbox can be watched for ice formation and melting. Sand and snow structures can be watered down and frozen.

Art

Many fun, messy, large, and imaginative art projects can be undertaken in the outdoor environment. The large space, different textures and objects, and ease of cleaning up are all factors that contribute to the success of this area. Foot and toe painting, for example, are great fun. Teachers need to be sure to label children's shoes. The children can also walk on freezer paper or draw on it with their toes. By mixing the paint with liquid soap, teachers can easily remove it. Finger and brush painting are also fun to do outside. The texture of the pavement, grass, or sand adds a new dimension to the activity. Many different sizes of brushes and paper can be used.

The size of the outdoor space easily enables children to work together on large projects. Using large house-painting brushes and water is enjoyable for children on a warm day. Children can "paint" the building, shed, trees, or bus. In the winter, children can use brushes and water with food coloring in it as "paint." They can paint pictures on the snow or decorate snow and ice sculptures they've made.



Water Play

A hose and sprinkler add laughter and coolness to almost any hot summer day. Water and bubbles are an especially winning combination. Bubble liquid can be formed by mixing 2,000 milliliters of water, 180 milliliters of liquid soap, and 60 milliliters of glycerine.

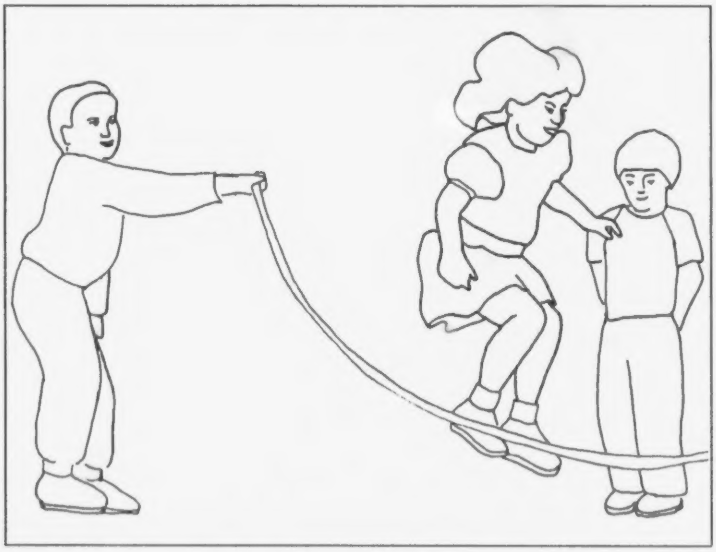
Large bubbles can then be formed with rubber rings from canning jars, straws, pipe cleaners, thin wire, or other hollow objects. Coloring added to the liquid can make the project even more fun. Children can blow their own bubbles by blowing the liquid out of straws.

Science Projects

As noted, nearly everything that happens outdoors is related to science. The changing of the seasons, the weather, the movement of clouds, and shade from a tree all offer lessons in science. Teachers should take time to look at water running in the gutter after rain and buds forming in a tree in spring to explain how nature works. Children may want to make collections of shells, stones, leaves, or bugs as part of their nature activities.

Games

Games and being outdoors are often synonymous. Children love to play games of any type. Teachers can use games as an opportunity to encourage social skills such as cooperation. Most games can in fact be modified to encourage children to work with each other rather than against each other. Parachute games, group ball games, trust games, and group problem-solving games are examples of games in which everyone wins and no one loses.



Old-fashioned games are also fun for children. Teachers can ask parents and grandparents to come in and teach the children their favorite games. Kick the can, hoop rolling, "ally ally over," and hokey-pokey are all games and word games used indoors. But all the swinging games, rhyming games, and word games used inside can also be fun outside. It's especially enjoyable for children to substitute outside words and names whenever appropriate. Games such as jacks, marbles, hopscotch, and skipping rope are all good outdoors as well as indoors. Games using balls, bats, croquet mallets, and horseshoes are all meant to be used outside.

Children can also be encouraged to make up their own games while they play outside. Most children enjoy making up rules, changing them, and negotiating new rules with others. The outdoor environment offers children both the space and the opportunity to play and enjoy games of all types.

Eating Outdoors

A planned picnic to the park or a surprise snack outside are experiences both children and teachers enjoy. Planning ahead will make eating outside go smoothly for everyone. The most important thing to remember is to serve easy-to-eat foods and foods that will not spoil. Here are some foods that are good for picnics:

- all types of fresh fruit;
- fresh vegetables (peas, carrots, celery, cauliflower);
- juices in individual containers;
- peanut butter and jelly sandwiches;
- hard-boiled eggs;
- pretzels, crackers, pita bread, bagels, and tortillas;
- nuts, seeds (pumpkin and sunflower), and dried fruit;
- olives and pickles; and
- tuna mixed with yogurt.

If teachers want to carry a cooler or have a grill available, the choices increase. In any event, teachers should plan foods that the children can be involved in fixing, such as ice cream, hotdogs, or a salad. If the classroom has a garden, it is a thrilling experience for children to pull the carrots, wash them, and put them in their salads.

Picnics are also an opportunity to increase children's social contacts. Because adults enjoy picnics as much as children do, teachers can invite parents, cooks, bus drivers, and other program staff to join in the event.

Field Trips

Going on field trips to other outdoor areas expands the children's world and provides new and exciting learning opportunities. As the trip is being planned, teachers should think about the goals for the trip. What do they want the children to learn and experience? How can they make sure these goals are accomplished? What activities can occur before and after the trip to enhance the experience?

Supervision and safety are the key elements of a pleasant trip. Field trips should not be too far away or in a place that will be crowded and noisy. Teachers should visit the place ahead of time to discuss with the people at the site what the children will want to experience. Teachers should be sure there are things to touch, explore, and try on.

The details of transportation, parent permission, food, bathrooms, and correct clothes need to be arranged ahead of time. Parents should be asked to accompany chidren to ensure proper supervision. Here are a few ideas for community field trips to outdoor areas:

- a greenhouse or nursery,
- a lumberyard,
- a gravel pit or construction site,
- a nature center or bird sanctuary,
- botanical gardens, and
- zoos.

Walks

Walks are a wonderful way to explore the outside environment with children. They are easy to plan and do not require as much preparation as field trips. Walks can be taken on the spur of the moment (i.e., at the first snowfall) and may also be planned into the weekly schedule.

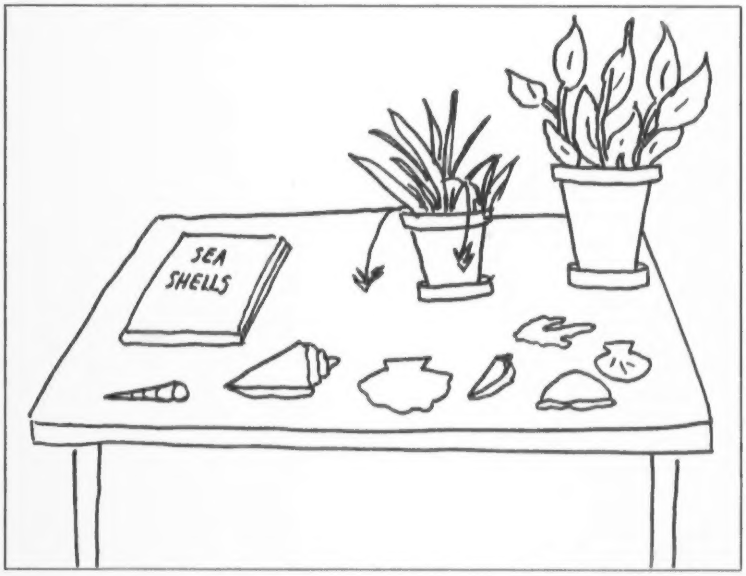
One way to assist children in looking for certain things on a walk is to have a "Let's Look For" walk. On these walks, adults and children look for specific things, and the discussion revolves around the chosen topic. Some objects of "Let's Look For" walks include the following:

animals,
flower gardens,
wind,
signs,
wetness (after rain),
smelling,
trees,
stores,
water,
things to measure,
shadows,
vegetable gardens,
snow,
birds,
shapes,
color,
rough, smooth, or soft areas/objects,
sounds,
trucks,
trash,
heat and cold,
tracks.

Planning ahead will make a "Let's Look For" walk an exciting learning experience. Teachers should pack in advance all the things they'll need for the walk, including:

- magnifying glasses,
- binoculars,
- bags, cartons, and something to collect things in,
- measuring tape and rulers,
- a camera,
- paper and crayons, and
- a tape recorder.

Many of the objects collected on walks can be brought back to the classroom and placed in the science area or other related interest areas. All these activities can be used by teachers to extend children's learning experiences. Teachers can use these activities or those of their own invention to make sure that children are using the outdoor environment to its full potential.



Scheduling Outdoor Activities

Outdoor play should be a part of the daily schedule. Several factors need to be considered, however. If classrooms are divided by age, younger children should go outside later in the morning when it is warmer and they will be more comfortable. Outdoor play should not take place directly after snacks or lunch for children of any age. Children will not feel like moving, and some may get upset stomachs.

Consideration should also be given to the number of other classrooms using the outdoor space. Schedules may have to be staggered, or classes will have to be outdoors at the same time. It is important for teachers to discuss scheduling with other teachers ahead of time so that children's safety and optimal use of the outdoor space can be ensured. Teachers should also plan with other teachers how to transport materials in and out if they do not have a shed. With advance planning, materials can reach the play area and be returned in an efficient way.

The teacher's time outside should also be planned. Because of the need for supervision, it is important that teachers be assigned to specific areas. If there are not enough adults to cover the important areas, others will have to be recruited, or only one of the areas should be used at a time. Planning makes outdoor play safe, manageable, and fun for all involved.

Weather Considerations

Unlike the indoor environment, the outdoors is constantly changing, and weather influences outdoor activities. The basic rule regarding the weather is to use common sense. It is important for children to be exposed to all types of weather, but they should never be exposed to any danger. Dangerous conditions include lightning storms, weather-watch conditions, intense heat or cold, and air-quality alerts. Teachers should know safety rules regarding storms just in case they get caught in them.

The daily schedule can be changed to accommodate change in weather. For example, on the first pretty day of spring or after the first snowfall, teachers may wish to extend class time outdoors. On a chilly, windy day, teachers may wish to cut back on outdoor play time. Often, though, it is adults who find weather conditions bothersome--not children. If the weather is not dangerous, children should have time outdoors every day. Children learn from watching leaves blow and feeling the wind brush their cheeks.

In areas of the country where winters are severely cold, many of the activities suggested in this module could not be conducted outdoors. It is important, however, to plan for children to get some fresh air and to have a place to use their large muscles. A few minutes outside to run around can be sufficient. Some space should be allocated indoors for large muscle games and for movement activities.

Rules for Outdoor Play

Because outdoor play involves many activities in which safety may become a concern, teachers should set rules to govern outdoor play. No more than four or five rules are suggested, as more than that would make outdoor play seem unduly troublesome. Moreover, most children have a hard time remembering more than five "do's" and "don'ts."

Teachers should go over the rules at the start of the school year, making sure that all children understand them. Rules might relate to the number of children who can use an activity area at one time, the types of outdoor clothing needed for particular types of weather, and which equipment is to be used or not used. Teachers need to be clear in explaining the consequences of breaking a rule. To be effective, rules must be applied without exception. When it comes to safety, breaking a rule serves no one. When rules are enforced, everyone's outdoor time is made better.

Helping Children Enjoy the Outdoors

One of the primary goals of the outdoor program is for children to learn to enjoy the outdoor environment. For many children, the chief obstacle to their enjoyment is learning how to share equipment and materials. Everyone wants to ride the trike, go down the slide, or pound the hammer. Even when there are duplicates of equipment and materials, problems in sharing often emerge.

How can teachers reduce these natural conflicts? First, it helps to remember that learning to share is a skill that children master gradually. Unfortunately, though, this process is far too slow for many a preschool child, and fights for turns are common. One solution teachers can adopt is to make use of a kitchen timer. The teacher can set the timer to five minutes and announce that this is how long each child's turn will be. Children can then watch the timer, hear the bell, and understand when their turn begins and ends. With set turns, conflicts can be reduced. This approach takes care of the immediate problem; the larger problem of learning to share can be addressed over time, through practice.

In the *Creative Curriculum*, teachers plan for and use the outdoor environment as a rich setting for learning and growth. This section has discussed the teacher's role outdoors, showing that it is as important as the role a teacher plays in the indoor environment. The next section looks at the other major role-players who help children learn from the outdoors: parents.

V. Supporting Children in Outdoor Play: The Parent's Role

A basic principle of the *Creative Curriculum* is that children's learning is enhanced when there is support at home for what the child does at school. When parents and teachers join forces, children always benefit.

Most parents know that it's important to let children play outside. They can appreciate the fact that the outdoors is healthy. They know that fresh air is invigorating, that running and climbing help let off steam, and that playing with other children is good social experience. But not all parents are aware of the many opportunities for learning that exist outdoors.

Teachers can serve an important function by letting parents know that the outdoors can be both fun and educational. Through information sharing, teachers can alert parents to the fact that all the learning that takes place inside the classroom can also take place outside. Teachers can point out that in some areas (e.g., science), even more learning occurs when children are outdoors.

Planning a Parent Workshop

One proven way of informing parents of the value of outdoor play is to hold a parent workshop on this topic or as part of an orientation to the program. Another alternative is to hold a "family workday" in which parents can join their children for outdoor activities.

A family workday is an effective way to have badly needed outdoor work performed. It also enables parents to be directly involved in their children's program and to learn some of the specific values of the outdoor environment. A workday needs to be well-planned if it is to go smoothly and accomplish its goals. Before the scheduled day, teachers should consider the following:

- Parents should be encouraged to visit the program ahead of time so they can observe what their children do outdoors.
- Staff should decide on a theme for the workday. Some suggestions are building a shed, tire swing, or climbing equipment; sanding; painting; and repairing equipment.
- All the needed equipment and materials should be gathered in advance.
- Parents need to be informed of the date for the workday in advance so they can schedule their plans around it.

To conduct the workday, teachers should consider the following ideas:

- A mini-workshop for parents should be planned for the beginning of the day to explain the value of the outside environment and demonstrate some of the things children learn in it.
- While working, teachers should talk to parents about the outside environment. In this casual atmosphere it is easy to talk with parents about what their children like and learn outside.
- A picnic or potluck dinner should be held at the end of the day to add an element of celebration. Discussions can occur during a meal on the value of outdoor activity.

If a workday is not possible, the more traditional workshop can, of course, be used to inform parents about the values of outside play. One technique to get parents thinking about outdoor play is to do a short imaging activity. Teachers can ask parents to think about their own experiences by asking questions such as these:

- What was your favorite outdoor activity when you were a young child?
- Where did you do it?
- Who did it with you?
- How did it make you feel?
- What did you learn from this activity?
- Why do you still remember it?

This technique helps adults remember their favorite activities and talk about them. Often teachers learn new or "old-time" games they can use, and parents remember the fun, freedom, and learning they experienced in the outside environment.

Here are some other activities that might be included in a parent workshop:

- informing parents about outdoor safety, including the pros and cons of common playground equipment;
- informing parents about available outside areas in the community, including parks and recreational areas;
- distributing a list of interesting outdoor areas that families can visit, including nature preserves, gardens, fish hatcheries, and so on;
- discussing all the things that can be learned in one's own backyard; and

- distributing a list of scheduled field trips and discussing suggested trips.

In addition to workdays and workshops, teachers should make it a habit to always invite parents to join in outdoor activities. Most parents are comfortable outside, and teachers have a chance to talk with them in an informal atmosphere. Grandparents and siblings can also be included. Being outdoors can be an enjoyable activity for all generations; everyone learns from the experience.

Encouraging Outdoor Play at Home

Being able to play outside for hours and summers on end is one of the joys of childhood. Taking walks, picking up insects, playing in puddles, having picnics, skipping rope, and watching clouds are often among the fondest memories that adults have of their childhood.

Nearly all parents let their children "go out to play." However, some parents may need ideas on how to expand, enhance, and become involved in their children's outside play. Explaining the types of things that children can do and learn outside is quite helpful to parents. Providing recipes for bubbles, ideas for sand and water or dramatic play, and different kinds of games is also very helpful. The following are some suggestions that teachers can give parents for helping children engage in creative and active outdoor play.

- Be sure there is some outdoor space available. If the home has no nearby yard or playground, encourage parents to use public parks.
- Save old plastic cups and containers, spoons, pans, trucks, cars, books, crayons, blankets, or towels for an outside toy collection.
- Store outside toys in a sturdy container such as an old laundry or beach basket that can easily be transported.
- Encourage children to collect objects of nature (e.g., stones, shells, bugs) and bring them home.
- When children show a particular interest in something, such as plants, construction, insects, animals, or weather, encourage this interest by asking and answering questions:

  "Where do ants live? What do they eat?"

  "How high do you think the plant will grow?"

  "How do buildings stand up?"

  "Does the kitty have eyelashes?"

Responding to Parents' Questions

As parents become more involved in their children's outdoor play and interests, they may have questions about what their children are learning or how they feel about some of the activities. It is important for teachers to respond in honest, direct ways. A parent may have questions about a child's behavior outside, how to say "no" to an unwanted pet snake, or the outdoor safety of a particular piece of equipment. Teachers should encourage interaction by talking to parents over the phone, inviting parents in, or sending a note home. It is important for parents to know that they have the teacher's support as they experiment with outside activities.

The outdoor environment is a place where children can develop any number of physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills. By working together with parents, teachers can set the stage for this exciting learning. The opportunities for children to grow and flourish outdoors multiply when teachers become partners with parents.

VI. For Further Reading on the Outdoor Environment

Playgrounds

Elison, Gail. *Play Structure*. Pasadena, CA: Pacific Oaks College and Children's School, 1974.

Frost, Joe L., and Barry Klein. *Children's Play and Playgrounds*. Austin, TX: Playgrounds International, 1983.

Hogan, Paul. *Playgrounds for Free*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974.

Gardening

Gale, Frank C., and Clarice W. Gale. *Experiences with Plants for Young Children*. Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1975.

Gjersvik, Maryanne. *Green Fun*. Riverside, CT: Chatham Press, 1974.

Paul, Aileen. *Kids Outdoor Gardening*. New York: Doubleday, 1978.

Nature

Nicklesburg, Janet. *Nature Activities for Early Childhood*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976.

Rights, Mollie. *Beastly Neighbors*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1981.

Rockwell, Robert E., Elizabeth Sherwood, and Robert Williams. *Hug A Tree*. Mt. Ranier, MD: Gryphon House, 1983.

Simon, Seymour. *Pets in a Jar*. New York: Puffin Books, 1975.

Science

McIntyre, Margaret. *Early Childhood and Science*. Washington, DC: National Science Teachers Association, 1984.

Harlan, Jean. *Science Experiences for the Early Childhood Years*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1984.

Hill, Dorothy M. *Mud, Sand, and Water*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1977.

Art and Field Trips

Kinser, Charleen. *Outdoor Arts for Kids*. Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1975.

Redleaf, Rhoda. *Open the Door, Let's Explore*. St. Paul, MN: Toys 'n Things Press, 1983

Evans, Doug. *Parachute Activities for Fun and Fitness.* Sioux Falls, SD: Fun and Fitness, 1971.

Fluegelman, Andrew. *The New Games Book.* New York: Doubleday, 1976.

Orlick, Terry. *The Cooperative Sports and Games Book.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Letters to Parents 367

- The Creative Curriculum 369
- Your Child and Blocks 370
- Your Child and House Corner 371
- Your Child and Table Toys 372
- Your Child and Art 373
- Your Child and Sand and Water Play 374
- Your Child and the Library Corner 375
- Your Child and Outdoor Play 376

Appendix B: Audiovisual Resources for the Creative Curriculum 377

Appendix A: Sample Letters to Parents

The Creative Curriculum

Dear Parents:

Throughout the year, we will be writing to you to share information about our program and to give you some suggestions of things to do at home that will help your child learn and grow.

When you visit your child's classroom, you will see that it is arranged by interest areas. There are areas for blocks, table toys, and books; an area for dramatic play (we call it the house corner) and for sand and water play, and a space for outdoor play. The classroom is set up this way for two important reasons. First, it helps the children decide where they want to play and which materials they want to select. Second, it provides smaller, well-defined spaces that appeal to young children and help them feel secure. In this type of learning environment, children can move at their own pace, learn to make age-appropriate choices, and experience success as they use a wide variety of play materials.

The shelves in our classroom are all at the children's eye level. The children can independently select the materials they need and return them at the end of each play period. The labels on the shelves and on the storage bins help children learn where each toy belongs. This makes clean-up easier and more fun.

You can use some of the same ideas in arranging your child's home learning environment. Here are some suggestions:

- Set up a low shelf in your child's room (or in an area used for play).
- Place toys on shelves (instead of in a toy box). This makes it easier for your child to find what he or she needs.
- Toys with small pieces, such as Legos, table blocks, and pegs, can be taken out of their original boxes and stored in sturdy cardboard shoe boxes or plastic bins. You can even make picture labels to put on the boxes (and on the shelves) to help your child organize toys.
- Help your child figure out a way to store his or her toys so they are readily available; for instance, books on one shelf, puzzles in one area, and dress-up clothes in another.

Your child will benefit most from (preschool/day care) when we all work together. We are always available to talk with you, and we welcome your ideas, questions, and involvement in our program.

Your Child and Blocks

Dear Parents:

When we talked with you about children's play with blocks at school, we told you how valuable blocks are for helping children learn about sizes and shapes, spatial relationships, math concepts, and problem solving. When children lift, shove, stack, and move blocks, they learn about weight and size, and they make decisions about how to place blocks to make a structure. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

Playing with big blocks requires a clear, flat floor space so that the blocks won't tip in the middle of construction. Small blocks are fine on a table top or tray. As your child builds with either kind of blocks and talks about his or her structure, you can suggest the kind of people, animals, or events that might go with it. Clothespins, small wooden or plastic animals and people, and trucks and cars will extend block building and allow for many variations in play. You will need to set out the blocks and notice the directions that your child's building takes. Ask your child to tell you about the castle, corral, hospital, apartment house, or village he or she is building.

Another fun activity with small table blocks is a matching game, which allows your child to match size, shape, and color in lining up small blocks or making designs. Set up a space where your child can sort the blocks into categories: all the yellow ones, all the square ones, or all the middle-sized ones, for instance. You can also try making color designs, such as red-blue-yellow, or shape patterns, such as big-bigger-biggest. There is no end to the variations that you and your child can try together.

By playing with blocks, your child can learn the following:

- to judge distance, space, and physical relationships;
- to create scenes for dramatic play;
- to stack blocks carefully, thereby developing eye-hand coordination and small muscle skills;
- to compare and sort; and
- to describe what he or she has made.

When children use blocks in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

"Tell me about your building."
"How did you decide to put those blocks together?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking about their block play. For example, we might say:

"Could you show me how to build a ramp for this new car?"
"What made that block stay up when you pulled the corner block away?"

You can try some of these ideas with your child at home. Block play offers many rich learning experiences.

Your Child and the House Corner

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about the values of dramatic play in the house corner. You can encourage the same kind of pretend play at home by having a box of dress-ups available or by putting a sheet over a card table and making a hideout for your child. Such activities are particularly good for a rainy day.

One way to extend your child's dramatic play is to collect different kinds of dress-up clothes and put them in boxes with picture labels showing the contents. For instance, one box could hold an apron, bibs, cups, plates, spoons, small cooking utensils, a wisk broom and other objects for use in the kitchen. Another box could contain lace slips, fake flowers, hats, brightly colored blouses, high heeled shoes, purses, old jewelry, and maybe an old wig. Still another container could hold a variety of hats and caps. Second-hand stores often have hats that are hard, hats with visors or recognizable insignia denoting an occupation, and shoes, neckties, shirts, vests, coats, or trousers. Another container could hold nurses' hats, white coats, toy thermometers, stethoscopes, empty pill bottles, a small pillow, an eye patch, and a watch.

When the time is appropriate, you can give your child one of the boxes and encourage play by asking questions such as these: "What can we do about this sick baby?" or " Will you make grandmother a birthday cake?"

Through dramatic play, your child can learn:

- to replay real-life situations;
- to use props to move from one idea to another in play;
- to make believe; and
- to use words and actions to express ideas and feelings.

When children are engaged in dramatic play in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

"What do mothers do when children are sick?"
"What kind of cake are you going to make: chocolate or vanilla?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play at pretending about life. For example, we might say:

"Why does your baby cry so much?"
"Where can we get some ice cream for the birthday cake?"

You can try some of these ideas at home when you encourage your child to dress-up and pretend. Along with having fun, your child will also be learning about his or her world in many meaningful ways.

Your Child and Table Toys

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about your child's table toy activities at school. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

Small colored cubes, those about one inch square, offer many opportunities for your child to build up or out. These cubes can be made into a tower, a corral, or other formations, depending on the child's interest. Colored cubes such as beads can be used to make patterns of colors and sizes: red, blue, yellow, and then repeat; large, small, medium, and then repeat.

You might collect various small objects such as buttons, seashells, rocks, and plastic bottle tops. You can give your child a tray to use on the floor if the surface is not level, or let him or her sit at a table to play. Ask your child to sort all the buttons that are the same color or all the beads that are the same size. Encourage your child to tell you about the design he or she is making or why things belong together.

By playing with table toys, your child can learn the following:

- to notice how things are the same and how they are different;
- to sort and classify things according to their own categories;
- to judge distance, direction, right and left, up and down, and height; and
- to tell you about an activity--what is happening as the play progresses.

When children use table toys in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

"Tell me about these blocks you are using."
"How did you get those rings to fit together?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play with table toys. For example:

"You grouped all the bottle tops by color. Can you put them together any other way [e.g., by size]?"
"You've picked out all the pegs that are the same. Can you tell me how they are the same?"

You can try some of these ideas with your child. Playing with table toys at home promotes a child's development in many important ways.

Your Child and Art

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about your child's art activities at school. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

Being able to create a picture or design satisfies a child for long periods of time. The necessary materials are minimal: flat space, paper, scissors, and paste to make a collage. If you save scraps of yarn, embroidery thread, pieces of tinsel, colored wrapping paper, colored envelope liners, scraps of cloth, cellophane, or any brightly colored and textured odds and ends in a box, your child will have many materials to create collages. You can expand the collage activity by cutting out pictures from magazines and adding them to the supply of materials.

By making collages, your child can learn the following:

- to be creative using materials at hand;
- to apply paste or to use scissors, both of which require fine muscle skills that are important for writing;
- to appreciate differences in texture, shape, and size; and
- to enjoy art for art's sake: the *process* is what's important.

When we do art activities at school, we talk with the children about what they are doing. We ask open-ended questions that encourage them to talk about their ideas and feelings. For example, we might say:

"Tell me about your picture."
"What would happen if you mixed two colors?"
"Which picture should we hang up?"

We also talk about what the children have done with the art materials. For example:

"You filled up the whole paper!"
"You spent a long time playing with the play dough. You worked hard!"
"I can see you really liked using the red paint today."

You can try some of these ideas with your child. Working with art materials at home can be enjoyable for both parents and children--and can enhance a child's learing on many levels.

Your Child and Sand and Water Play

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about your child's sand and water play at school. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

You may think be concerned that sand and water will be too messy for you to bother with, but if you can set up a place outdoors for sand and water play, you will find your child will really enjoy experiencing these materials. For indoor play, the bathtub is an ideal place, as is the kitchen sink. If you spread an old sheet or a large piece of plastic (or a painter's drop cloth), you can protect the floor from sand. The pleasure that your child will derive from pouring water or sifting sand will make the clean-up worthwhile.

The same utensils can be used in both sand and water play. Measuring cups, spoon sieves, scoops, pitchers, plastic bottles with lids or spouts, and small bowls are appropriate. Soap can be added to the water to wash the utensils before they are put away as well as to provide soapy water for bubble blowing. Water play can be varied by adding food coloring to different containers so that your child will be able to see the changes in color that result when water from different containers is mixed.

You can make a collection of little cars, dolls, animals, scraps of wood, and pieces of greenery for your child to use in a tray or dishpan of sand--a sort of miniature sand box. Any small items can be used to make villages, farmyards, or airports. Spools, bottle caps, small plastic figures--all can serve as props for sand play.

By playing with sand and water, your child can learn the following:

- to notice the differences between dry and wet sand, warm and cold water;
- to pour with increasing skill, thereby developing eye-hand coordination and small muscle skills;
- to measure and compare different amounts of sand and water; and
- to use imagination to create scenes and stories.

When children play with and use sand and water in the classroom or playground, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

"How does the sand feel when it slips through your fingers?"
"What does that water color remind you of?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play in sand or water. For example, we might say:

"Why do you think that bottle is floating and this one is sinking?"
"Why do you think the sand stays molded when you turn the cup upside down?"
"What else do you see around here that matches the new color you've made?"

You can try some of these ideas with your child. There are endless enjoyable opportunities for your child to learn by playing with sand and water at home.

Your Child and the Library Corner

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about your child's library activities at school. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

The most important way in which you can help your child become a reader is to read books together every day. A rich supply of good children's books readily available every day will encourage your child to love books and want to read. The public library is a wonderful resource for families with young children.

Another way in which you can prepare your child for reading and writing is to help your child understand the relationship between the spoken word and what is written on paper. To reinforce this idea, you can write down your child's dictated stories, word for word. Then read back what you have written to show that you have captured the words on paper. Point out that writing always begins on the top left side of the page and that the words move from left to right. Move your finger along under the words as you read. Point out the words that recur in the story and show how they are alike by outlining their shape. When the story is written, let your child draw pictures to illustrate it.

As you read with your child, he or she can learn the following:

- to love books and stories;
- to recall events in a story and be able to repeat them;
- to recognize that written marks on a page represent spoken words and ideas; and
- to listen to and understand a story.

When we read to children at school, we encourage them to ask questions, repeat interesting phrases, and tell us what they think might happen next. For example, we might say:

> "Tell me what happened to Goldilocks when she was downstairs in the bear's house."
> "Why do you think Mrs. Mallard took her ducklings across that busy street?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they use books. For example, we might say:

> "Do you think real boys and girls can sometimes sprout wings and fly as the children did in this story?
> "What do you think is going to happen next? Tell me before I turn the page."
> "Suppose the children in the story had taken the other path. Where do you think they would be now?"

You can try some of these ideas at home with your child. Reading to children and writing together provide many joyful and quiet times and encourage lifelong learning.

Your Child and Outdoor Play

Dear Parents:

We have talked with you about your child's outdoor play at school. Here are some suggestions for providing similar experiences at home.

Outdoors is the perfect place for children to run, jump, swing, climb, and use all the large muscles in their bodies. They need space to work out and let off steam. They can race around, or they can breathe the fresh air, look at the clouds, or catch a ball or a bug. They not only satisfy their physical needs for large muscle activity but also can develop a sense of wonder about the miracles that take place in nature.

You can provide wooden boxes and boards for play houses or an obstacle course; gardening tools to dig, plant, and cultivate a little garden; a big paint brush and a pail of water to "paint" walls or fences; large balls to kick or throw; or old blankets or sheets to make a tent. You can take a walk around the block with your child and talk about all the different colors of cars that pass by. Your child will take great pleasure in collecting rocks, finding bugs, watching birds and airplanes in the sky, or pretending to go camping.

At school when we're outdoors, we talk about all the things we can see, hear, touch, and feel so that the children become aware of changes in the weather and the seasons, of growth in plants, and animals. We help the children notice changes by asking them what's different about the trees, the caterpillars, or the sky. They lie on the ground and look up, or they climb the jungle gym and look down. We point out the many kinds of birds that fly by, the butterflies, the mosquitos, the milkweed seeds, the falling leaves, and the rain as it begins. We wonder aloud where all these things come from.

By playing outdoors, your child can learn the following:

- to notice changes in nature;
- to discover what happens to people, animals, and plants when it's cold, hot, dark, or light, outside;
- to use his or her body in increasingly skillful ways; and
- to be a good observer.

When the children play outdoors at school or go on field trips, we encourage them to talk about what they're doing. For example, we might say:

"What happened to the sun just now? I don't see it anymore."
"What is making the trees bend over the way they are today?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play outdoors. For example, we might say:

"What happened to the water in this pan? It's hard now. What do we need to do to make it pour?"
"If you keep digging your hole, how far down can you go?"

You can try some of these ideas with your child outdoors at home or on a trip to the park, the beach, the woods, or wherever you can find a place to run. Playing outdoors is fun for parents and children--and enhances children's learning in many important ways.

Appendix B:
Audiovisual Resources for The Creative Curriculum

Audiovisual Resources for The Creative Curriculum

Audiovisual materials are particularly effective in helping parents, governing boards, and staff understand an early childhood program. The following resources are designed to complement *The Creative Curriculum*. They can be used for training sessions as well as for presentations.

The Creative Curriculum

This 37-minute videotape presents *The Creative Curriculum* in action. Filmed in five different preschool classrooms, it explains how teachers set the stage for learning by creating a dynamic and well-organized environment. Each of the seven interest areas--blocks, house corner, table toys, art, sand and water, library, and outdoors--is featured in separate segments. Viewers are given a lively presentation of how children learn in each area and how teachers can promote and extend this learning.

For information on ordering the videotape, write to or call:

Creative Associates International, Inc.
3201 New Mexico Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20016
(202) 966-5804

Room Arrangement as a Teaching Strategy

This filmstrip presents concrete ideas for arranging preschool classrooms to support positive behavior and learning. The presentation shows classrooms before and after they were rearranged and discusses how children can be expected to react to the physical environment. The 23-minute filmstrip and cassette are in two parts.

Part I: The Effect of Room Arrangement and the Display of Materials on Children's Behavior

Part II: How the Physical Environment Can Be Organized to Emphasize Certain Skills and Concepts

A 40-page booklet contains the complete narration, illustrations of the room arrangements presented in the filmstrip, and ideas on how to present the materials to parents and staff.

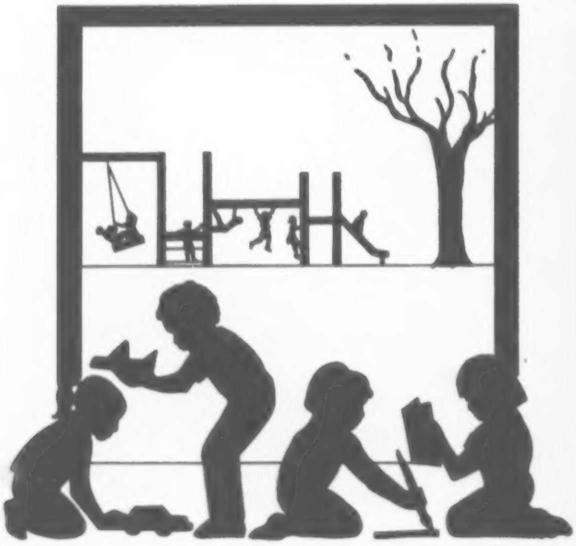
To order the filmstrip package, write to:

Teaching Strategies
6407 32nd St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20015

or call Creative Associates (202-966-5804) for further information.

TEACHING STRATEGIES
6407 32nd Street NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20015

THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



PS 017266

REVISED AND
EXPANDED

ENSURING QUALITY THE CREATIVE WAY

Experts agree that a high-quality early childhood program must be developmentally appropriate. This means that:

- children learn at their own pace through active interactions;
- the environment is well-planned and includes a rich variety of materials and choices;
- teachers ask questions that expand children's play and support positive self-esteem; and
- parents play a meaningful role in the program and have a good understanding of its philosophy and goals.

The Creative Curriculum shows teachers how to establish a developmentally appropriate program.

WHAT IS THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM?

The Creative Curriculum is an environmentally based, comprehensive curriculum. It provides teachers with the framework and the freedom to organize a program that supports their role and children's learning. The curriculum includes an introductory module called *Setting the Stage,* which explains the philosophy of the curriculum; presents goals and objectives for children's learning; and includes information on how to set up the physical environment, an overview of the teacher's role, and suggestions for strengthening the role of parents.

The remaining seven modules focus on the following interest areas:

Blocks	Sand and Water
House Corner	Library Corner
Table Toys	Outdoors
Art	

Each illustrated module is filled with practical ideas on how to set up the interest area, what children can learn playing with materials, and how teachers can promote and extend learning. One section in each module discusses the parent's role: how to help parents understand the importance of each interest area and what parents can do at home to extend children's learning.

AN EXCELLENT TRAINING TOOL

Trainers and program directors who have field-tested *The Creative Curriculum* find that it is easy for teachers to implement because it is practical and concrete. Using the curriculum leads teachers to:

- gain a better understanding of how children learn in developmentally appropriate programs;
- reorganize the indoor and outdoor environments to support positive teacher-child and child-child interactions;
- make the environment the focus of learning (as opposed to circle time and teacher-directed activities);
- change their communication with children from a testing and directing mode to one of asking open-ended questions and facilitating problem solving; and
- provide more small group and individualized activities rather than large group activities.

THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

A spiral-bound, illustrated book with eight modules: *Setting the Stage*, *Blocks*, *House Corner*, *Table Toys*, *Art*, *Sand and Water*, *Library Corner*, and *Outdoors*.

$39.95

VIDEOTAPE ON THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

A 37-minute videotape that shows *The Creative Curriculum* in action. Demonstrates in a lively and engaging way how a thoughtfully organized environment supports children's learning. Can be shown in short segments that focus on each interest area.

$99.50

ORDER FORM

	No. of Copies	Price	Total
The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood	_____ @	$39.95	_____
Videotape on *The Creative Curriculum*	_____ @	$99.50	_____
Postage and Handling			_____
TOTAL			_____

Postage and Handling:

$39.95-$80.00	$4.00
$80.00-$100.00	$4.75
$100.00-$140.00	$6.00
Over $140.00	6% of net order

No charge for postage and handling on prepaid orders.

Please make checks payable to:

TEACHING STRATEGIES

6407 32nd Street NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20015

TEACHING STRATEGIES

6407 32nd Street NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20015

About The Authors

Diane Trister Dodge, Vice President of Creative Associates International, Inc., has been in the field of early childhood education for over 20 years. She has designed and implemented educational and training programs for Head Start, day care, and other preschool programs in urban and rural settings. A central focus of her work has been the use of the environment as the basis for curriculum planning. Her publications include *A Guide for Education Coordinators in Head Start* and *Room Arrangement as a Teaching Strategy*.

Marilyn Goldhammer is an early childhood educator who participated in the development of the *Head Start Performance Standards* and *Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements*. She has developed curricula for and trained family day care providers, day care center staff, and parents.

Laura J. Colker is the author of numerous articles and publications for children, teachers, and parents. She played a leading role in FOOTSTEPS, a television series on parenting, and lectures on parent education, sex education, and child development issues.

Creative Associates International, Inc. is an educational consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., which specializes in human resources development. Its corporate mission is to strengthen social and technical systems by providing people with the necessary skills and resources to support lasting change. Working with a variety of clients, Creative Associates provides technical and managerial assistance in early childhood education, teacher training, business development, special events planning and coordination, manpower and organizational development, and information management.